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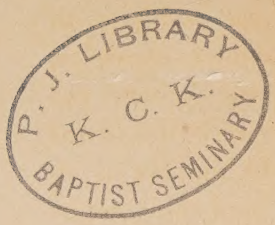

JESUS AMONG MEN

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JESUS AMONG MEN

BY

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"THE WAY OF JESUS," ETC.

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TO

DR CHENG CHING-YI

FOR SOME YEARS MY COLLEAGUE IN CHINA,
IN COMPANY WITH WHOM I HAVE LEARNED MUCH OF CHRIST,
IN RESPONSE TO WHOSE SUGGESTION THESE STUDIES WERE WRITTEN
I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE THIS BOOK

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PREFACE

These simple studies are intended primarily for private and family reading. The subjects touched are big ones, and the whole approach is one which might be used to make a book for scholars. What is here attempted is a very different thing. Many people decide to read the Bible day by day, but find some difficulty through lack of a little guidance. Perhaps the passages are so familiar that they have lost their hold, and what is wanted is a new angle of vision on the well-worn and well-loved text. Perhaps there have been early associations that give a certain distaste for the Bible; it has lost its grip for causes we scarcely realize and cannot analyse. Perhaps we are simply "too busy" and leave on one side what seems to have little immediate bearing on the day's work.

To any such these studies are offered in the hope that by a few words of "setting" and by a few pointed questions, as well as by the general arrangement and underlying thought, the reader may be helped to think his way afresh into the significance for to-day of the most wonderful life that has ever been lived. The reader is asked to begin at a point

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where many to-day are not willing to begin. May the writer suggest that anyone who cannot make any assumption about Jesus of Nazareth may yet take as a working hypothesis for his study what others will take as axiomatic. Beginning thus, and looking honestly at the evidence presented, he may discover for himself whether the hypothesis is one to be held or to be discarded. The writer asks for nothing more.

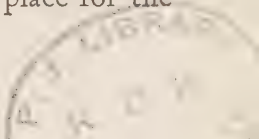
The records contained in the four Gospels are taken, broadly speaking, at their face value. Discussions of the miraculous, questions as to the relative value of the first three Gospels and the fourth Gospel, problems of the authenticity of certain passages questioned by modern scholars are not considered suitable material for a volume of this character. They have not been forgotten, and the attempt has been made to avoid raising issues unnecessary in the devotional hour and outside the main purpose of the volume. Where the reader holds views on such questions different from the author's, he is asked to take what is possible from the study and leave the rest. For controversial questions he will look elsewhere.

The practice of family reading is one which has not been in vogue recently as much as formerly. There is, however, much to be said for it. The growing boys and girls and not less the adults have much to gain from a daily recollection of God and

His claim upon them. If these studies could be used as a means of trying out again this practice, it would be a matter of great satisfaction to the writer. He believes they may help to give point to the passage read, and that they are easily used in such a way. Perhaps an evening together once a week might give opportunity in some families for a quiet talk on the deeper issues of life, and for this purpose the Review of the Week may serve as a starting-point for thought and discussion.

In some cases the studies may be used by groups in college or elsewhere who want to undertake serious Bible study. For such, some collateral reading is desirable, and a brief list of suitable books is appended. For the daily study a good Harmony of the Gospels (such as Stevens and Burton, which has been largely followed here) is recommended as facilitating cross-reference and getting the order of events clearly in mind. It is hoped that the questions asked in the daily studies and in the Review Section may serve to stimulate discussion. If each student keeps a note-book and jots down ideas that come to him in daily readings, he may find it easier to take a helpful part in the weekly discussion group, and he may value such notes as a means of refreshing his mind afterwards in regard to the main points learned in the studies.

The writer is under no illusion as to the studies which have been prepared in the first place for the



ordinary church member in the Chinese churches which he has been serving for the last few years. His own little volume, *The Way of Jesus*, which was also prepared for use in China, but has been widely used in England and America, may be regarded as a companion one to this, dealing particularly with the teaching, as this with the life of Christ. Its reception encourages him to believe that the present volume may also have some service in the West. In any case his one hope is that the studies may help to bring men face to face with Jesus Christ Himself. Any interest or value they may have is derived from the abiding value and interest of One whom we still look to as the Word of God—the Saviour of Mankind.

HENRY T. HODGKIN.

On the *Majestic*,
10th July 1929.

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JESUS AMONG MEN

INTRODUCTION

During the Easter season, 1928, some 230 persons, drawn from fifty-one lands in East and West, and belonging to almost every considerable section of Protestant Christendom, spent about two weeks together on the Mount of Olives. No similar gathering has ever been held, or indeed has been possible until recently, for it is not many years since there were no Christian Churches in a number of the countries represented. These people were called together by the International Missionary Council, and were chosen as the trusted leaders in many different bodies which have been formed to make co-operation possible between Christians of different sections of the Church. What this group has said may fairly be regarded as commanding respect, not only among Christians but among many outside the Church, who want seriously to know what Christianity is, and why it claims so much. For the student of religion, as well as for the ordinary man, it is well to have the clear statements made at Jerusalem, and none is clearer than this :—

> "Our message is Jesus Christ. He is the revelation of what God is, and of what man through Him may become. In Him we come

face to face with the ultimate reality of the universe."[1]

We take this simple yet profound statement as the starting-point for a series of studies of Jesus Christ. We do not ask every student to accept this statement at the outset as necessarily true. What we ask is that he should realize that it contains a very serious challenge to thought, that it is made by a remarkable body of thoughtful and high-minded men and women, who are trusted by millions more for their leadership and spiritual insight, and that therefore it is worth while to examine the life of Jesus Christ, as it is presented to us in the Gospels, in order to see what conclusions we ourselves may draw from the consideration of it.

While it is not intended, then, to limit the use of these studies to those who call themselves Christians, it is hoped that to many Christians they will prove of value. What is the Christian message? We often hear this question asked. Here is an answer—very brief and pointed. It contains, we believe, the essential root of the matter. It should be a matter of great concern to every Christian to know what is the message, and how it may be carried to others, for every Christian is called not only to believe in Christ, but also to bring to others the Word of Life which is in Christ. This fresh study of the person of Jesus Christ is intended to help us clearly to see what it means for us all that God is like Christ and that men may become like Him.

[1] *The World Mission of Christianity*, p. 7, from The International Missionary Council, 2 Eaton Gate, London, S.W. 1.

We take our stand for this study among the men and women Jesus knew and lived with. We try to picture, using the Gospels, the effect of His life upon them. We try to understand what it was in Jesus which produced these effects. In probing into this matter we shall, if this statement made at Jerusalem be true, find out a great deal about God. We shall realize afresh how God treats us, and how we should respond to that treatment. The word God, which means such different things to different people, and which means so little to many, will come to have a very definite meaning for those who study the life of Jesus. We have something to go upon, not a mere theory woven out of some person's imagination, but an actual life which was lived nineteen hundred years ago, and which is recorded for us in trustworthy books.

Of course many people are engaged in studying these books, and some have claimed that they are not worthy of trust, or even that they do not contain history but fiction. The best scholarship in the world has been turned to this question. All that we can say here is that the historical value of the books has been vindicated. This does not mean that every scholar agrees that every single word in them is historically accurate. It does mean that the picture is a true picture in its broad outline, and that Jesus actually lived the kind of life there recorded, and spoke such words as are put into His mouth by these historians whom we call the Evangelists. We are, in fact, dealing not with romance but with history when we study the life of Jesus.

As we do this there will surely come to us, as to

so many before us, a clearer idea of God. We shall know that we are seeing something of the " ultimate reality of the universe." But that is not all. We shall be aware that such a life was actually lived, even in a world which did not seem at all a suitable place for such a person to live in. We often say that the teachings of Jesus are really too idealistic. Perhaps it is simpler and better to take rather lower ground, such as many other sages have taken, and only attempt what we know to be within our reach. Here, in the story of Jesus, we have this remarkable fact that the Sage lived what He taught. He is the embodiment of His high ideals. They were worked out in His personality. When we realize what this means, we see that human life is capable of being lived on this high plane, in fact, that we are in the world for this very purpose, to become like Christ. We do not simply say " God is like that," and stop short in amazement. We go on to say, "We may become like that," and are stirred by a new hope and a new spirit.

This new hope and spirit are the testimony that Jesus still lives. He comes to us—He will surely come to us in this study—not only as a man who lived and died, and whose glorious example is for ever to be studied and admired. He comes to us also in a deeper spiritual way. A voice speaks to us, we are charmed, lifted up, enlightened, strengthened. Something begins to happen in our lives. Things that were impossible become possible. We can forgive where we thought we could only nourish thoughts of revenge ; we can endure where we were sure we should give way ; we can rejoice where

sorrow seemed inevitable; we look out on life in a different way. This has happened to multitudes in all ages. It is just because the men and women who met in Jerusalem had had such experiences that they were able to write these words. They knew for themselves and by the witness of many others that human nature can be changed when we see in Christ "the revelation of what God is, and of what man through Him may become."

May we, therefore, enter upon this study either with the conviction that this testimony to Jesus is true, the confidence that we shall make fresh discoveries about God and man, or at least with the hope that what has been said by these men and women may prove for us, too, to be true, and that we may find ourselves, as we study, "face to face with the ultimate reality of the universe."

FIRST WEEK

JESUS AND THE COMMON MAN

Introductory Note.

This week we shall read passages which help us to understand the impression Jesus made upon the common people as He met them in Palestine. These people were much like ourselves—peasants and fishermen, shopkeepers and labourers, mothers and fathers and children, with little cares and anxieties, trying to make the best of difficulties, sometimes full of joy and hope, sometimes very sad or even discouraged. They were strong nationalists, who loved their country and desired to see it free and strong. They had suffered many things from cruel rulers, from robbers, from sickness, from unkind treatment by neighbours. They had a hard struggle to maintain their daily life. They had a home life, where there was much affection and goodwill, yet where, no doubt, there were often worries, and where it was often hard to know how to meet the needs of all.

It was among such ordinary people that Jesus lived. He seemed at first to be just an ordinary man like the rest. He lived in a family that seemed to be like any other, that of a hard-working carpenter and his wife and children. Jesus had to take His place as one among the children. He had to obey His

parents and live His life under the limitations of a poor home, where work was the order of the day, and where there can have been few if any luxuries. Out of such a home He came ; out of a village where He knew the neighbours, with all their troubles and pleasures. He had lived the same kind of life they lived. When He went about in the little towns of Galilee, and by the seashore and through the cornfields, He met people like ourselves, and what we want to ask ourselves this week is: What did they think of Him? In doing this we can also ask: What should we think of Him if He were here to-day?

First Day. A Day of Healing. *Read Mark* i. 21-28.

What are the things that strike you in these verses? The people were astonished. Here was a person very much like themselves, whose home they may have known, from whom they expected—what? The unexpected happened: this familiar person began to say and do things they never expected. Let us think how strange it must have seemed. Has anyone you know done strange things that have caused people to wonder? Suppose you ask the question: What was it that made people wonder at such a person's actions or words? Then we might consider what difference or what similarity there is in the things that made these people wonder at the words or acts of Jesus of Nazareth.

Capernaum was a little town by the lake side. It is possible the family of Jesus had moved their home to Capernaum. In any case it was so near to Nazareth

that many would know both places. Jesus did many things there and found some of His followers in this city. In the verses to-day we get the first impression of His teaching and healing. It is clear that this made a sensation in the neighbourhood. Is it surprising?

SECOND DAY. GROWING POPULARITY. *Read Mark* i. 29-39.

Astonishment turns to popularity. It is very easy to see why Jesus was so much sought after. He was a great doctor. People are always ready to follow one who can heal their sickness. He gave His services and Himself freely and without cost to all who came. However difficult His teaching may have seemed, everyone could understand the healing touch, the look of sympathy that accompanied it, the word of cheer so often spoken. It all sounds very simple. Yet it was an exhausting process for Jesus. We have one indication of that in the story of the woman who touched the hem of His garment. Power had to go out from Jesus to people He healed (Mark v. 30). Why did it cost so much to Jesus? Had the cost to Him anything to do with His popularity? Why do you think He went into the desert to pray after the crowds had come to Him? (v. 35). We think of Jesus to-day surrounded by wondering and admiring crowds. If He were moving about in the world we know to-day, would there be such crowds gathering wherever He went, or are we, perhaps, too blasé? Let us use our imagination to picture what our own and our friends' reaction would be if the things we read of in the Gospels happened to-day.

THIRD DAY. THE LEPER TOUCHED. *Read Mark* i. 40-45.

A leper is a person whose disease is particularly unpleasant to others. In Palestine lepers were cast out from the society of their fellows. They were regarded as unclean, and none might touch them. They had to shout, "Unclean, unclean," when they went along the street, so that people might get away from them. They well knew that every one loathed them. If we think of Jesus as a great teacher, far above us all, we may well be surprised that a leper would dare to speak to Him. How do you think it happened that this man had so much courage as to break through this invariable custom? Perhaps there was something in the look and manner of Jesus that gave him confidence. Must we revise our picture of Jesus so as to understand how such a thing could happen? It is clear He was not only a popular hero, but also very easily approached. How different from many great men of the world, who set a barrier between themselves and the wretched and hopeless ones!

We may notice again that, while Jesus helped this man, even touching his horrible, contagious body, He clearly wanted to avoid publicity. Why? Was He not willing to help all? This question must be considered again later.

FOURTH DAY. A FRIEND OF CHILDREN. *Read Mark* x. 13-18.

It was not only the sick and wretched who had confidence in coming to Jesus. Here we see the

children coming. Notice that the disciples were already so much impressed with the importance of Jesus (and perhaps with their own importance as His followers) that they thought Him too busy to be troubled with children. But the mothers must have seen something in Jesus which led them to expect a different treatment. What was it that made them dare to bring their children? There is no doubt as to who it was—disciples or mothers—who really understood the heart of Jesus. It is still often true that a mother's quick intuition—the insight born of love—pierces to a truth that wiser folks miss. Have we seen this characteristic in Jesus that gave the mothers such an assurance, even in spite of the opposition of the disciples? It is a great thing for anyone when he sees this, and all that it means as to the nature of God and the world in which we live.

Fifth Day. The Effect of His Personality. *Read John* vii. 32, 45-52.

It was not only the healing works and the kindly looks of Jesus that drew men to Him. They also came to listen—great crowds hung on His words. In the first day this week we read how His words impressed people because He knew what He was talking about. People will always come and listen to those who have something to say. The scribes could quote the authority of the past. The words of Jesus had an authority of their own. When people heard Him speak they knew in themselves that what He said was true.

In the passage to-day we have another contrast.

These wise and important men who could not see anything remarkable in the words of Jesus on the one hand; and on the other the soldiers who probably had no book-learning, but who heard Jesus with wonder and awe. They knew they were listening to something quite unique. What do you think it was in the teaching of Jesus which appealed to people like this, and made them say: "Never man spake like this man?" Does that same quality in the words of Jesus strike us? Note these men were prevented from doing their plain duty, so it must have been a pretty deep impression that was made on them. They probably expected severe punishment for their breach of discipline.

SIXTH DAY. A ROYAL WELCOME. *Read Mark* xi. 1-10.

Jesus at the height of His popularity. He chooses to enter Jerusalem in the way foretold by the prophet as that of the expected Messiah. See Zech. ix. 9, where it is distinctly said that "thy king cometh unto thee . . . riding upon an ass." The people of Jerusalem had heard much of Jesus, and many had seen Him in His previous visits. At the time of the feast many from Galilee would be in Jerusalem. Jesus gave them a chance to show their appreciation of Him. Yet He chooses a lowly form of entry. He is the king who is a servant, not the lordly one who dominates all others. The people were expecting a king or Messiah to deliver them from the tyranny of Rome. Do you think they welcomed Him partly because they expected Him to be such a leader? What other reasons can you

discover for this outburst of enthusiasm? In the light of what follows we are bound to recognize that it had a good deal of the temporary excitement in it that so often seizes a crowd. Yet Jesus seems to have sought this occasion deliberately, and even welcomed the spontaneous expressions of the people. See Luke xix. 39, 40, where the Pharisees complain of the crowd's enthusiasm. Think what it would mean for any oppressed people now if a deliverer appeared with miraculous powers and wonderful speech, able to stir up such enthusiasm in men's hearts!

SEVENTH DAY. FINAL REJECTION. *Read Luke* xxiii. 13-25.

In these verses we have the amazing and terrible contrast. Note that Pilate called "the people" as well as their leaders. No doubt they had been urged by the leaders to take this course. But is it not an amazing change to take place within a week? If we are to understand the impression Jesus made upon men, we cannot look only at His popularity. We have to ask ourselves why that popular hero was allowed to die, why even possibly some, who acclaimed Him king, a few days later cried, "Crucify him, crucify him." Some few remained faithful in their hearts, but a great change must have taken place when a robber was preferred to Jesus, and nothing was done to prevent His death. How can we explain that the same person who helped all who came to Him, who touched the leper and took the children in His arms, whose words charmed the soldiers and who was followed by enthusiastic multitudes, aroused

also the fury and passion that turned against Him in His time of need and sent Him to the Cross? Here is one of the great mysteries of the Gospel story. Yet it is not insoluble. We have the facts that give the answer, and some of them are written within the heart of each one of us.

Review of the Week.

Let us remember our purpose. We are studying Jesus because many people have seen in Him what God is like. So we ask ourselves at each stage of our study: "What have I to learn about God by the study of Jesus this day, or this week?" We have seen Jesus as men first saw Him, apparently just one of themselves and then, with growing astonishment, so different as to cause them to think and ask themselves questions. Note, for example, the discussion of Him in John vii. 12 and 25-27 and other similar passages. There was a keen expectation of a heaven-sent helper for the people, and this certainly led to an interest in Jesus on the part of the common man. But that is not enough to explain the effect He produced. The large following of the early days of His ministry, and even the crowd that welcomed Him to Jerusalem, are indications that He answered some deeper longing in men's hearts. He awakened new hopes, He took away fear, He seemed to understand men's inner struggles, He showed kindness to all, and especially to the neglected and insignificant.

Think over these and similar thoughts that have been in your mind through the week. If Christ was like this, can God be less interested and kindly? Does this human life act like a window through which

we see what the heart of the universe is like ? When we listen to His words and study His life, does anything in us answer with a sense of joy and relief ? If so, may it not be because this man is actually helping us to see " what God is ? "

But we have another purpose in our study. We have been told that Jesus also helps us to see what man may become. Which of the characteristics of Jesus as they have been revealed in this week are such as we would like to have ? Are there any we should not wish to possess ? Among the many things which we can learn as we think of the life of Jesus, is the kind of life God meant us to live.

We closed with a difficult question. This man, who was so much loved and trusted, in the end met a cruel death. Is there something in God then which men resent and dislike ? God is a Father, and we ought to think of Him as loving us in the same way that Jesus loved men. That would make us very eager to know Him better. Yet every now and then we find ourselves shrinking from that knowledge. We can't bear to see God. He is too great and pure. We turn away in despair. Does this help us to understand why men turned against Jesus, the Healer and Lover of mankind ? If there is something in my life I would not like Jesus to see, I may perhaps thrust Him away. The two-sided attitude towards Jesus reveals a two-sided nature in me. Something makes me want Him and love Him : something else makes me shrink from Him and almost hate Him. So in me the fickle crowd is seen over again. Our study of Jesus will constantly bring us back to ourselves and cause us to ask this question : If men may

become like Him, what is it that prevents me from being like Him ? There are some questions which we cannot answer at once. They follow us for a long time and will not be easily answered. Our study of Jesus begins then with raising questions which will only be properly answered as we go on studying Him day by day.

SECOND WEEK

JESUS AND THE PHARISEES

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

Last week we rapidly reviewed the impression made upon the common people by Jesus of Nazareth, their wonder, enthusiasm and final rejection. We have now to study in more detail how each group of people thought of Jesus and how He dealt with them. We begin with the group whose antagonism to Jesus was most acute—the leaders, especially the religious leaders. Every reader of the New Testament realizes that this conflict began early and deepened with the passage of time, until it came to a head in the arrest of Jesus by these religious leaders. Who were the Pharisees? They were men of upright life and strong convictions. They were leaders in religious thought. They were extremely careful to do all that the law demanded, and even to go beyond its actual requirements, lest in even the smallest thing they might offend. They were intensely zealous for the Jewish religion and would take the greatest pains to convert others to it. They believed in God as a jealous God, who was, in a certain sense, the special property of the Jewish people, though their way of expressing it would be that the Jews were the people chosen by God, and between them and all others there was a deep gulf.

With all their good points the Pharisees had also some serious faults. They were self-righteous : they despised others : they missed the spirit in their zeal for the letter : they were formal in their religion and lacked insight and kindliness. These things led to hypocrisy—a pretence that they were better than they were, keeping up appearances at all costs ; making others suffer rather than lose face themselves, a determination to keep their own position and prestige. It was this temper which so soon led to the antagonism towards Jesus. The presence of Jesus was a perpetual reproof to them. In many ways He was just the opposite of these men. His life was one of spontaneous goodness, of ready response to men's deepest needs. The recognition granted to Him by the common people was felt by the Pharisees to be a condemnation of them and of what they stood for. Jesus did not accept their interpretation of life, and they were accustomed always to have it accepted as if it were the truth of God. Is it surprising that there was difficulty as between Jesus and the Pharisees ?

First Day. John the Baptist and the Pharisees.
Read Matt. iii. 1-12.

Before considering Jesus and the Pharisees it is interesting to see how John, the forerunner, met them. We notice that many came to his baptism. Perhaps this was because, behind their self-righteousness, there was a deep, unspoken longing for a better way of life. Do you not think that many must have been unsatisfied with a formal religion ? Perhaps what John was saying struck a chord in their hearts,

and they said to themselves: What if, after all, he is right?

John's habits and demeanour would remind them of the old prophets who preached in such severe and terrible words about the punishment of sin and the need for reform, about the uselessness of mere forms and the need for an inward change. Perhaps they recognized in his message what had stirred them in the Old Testament. It may be that they simply thought that here was another ritual—the baptism of John—and in order to be safe they would accept it. If he were God's messenger it would be useful: if not, no harm was done!

Notice that John spoke very plainly to them. He saw through all the shams. He called them to look at themselves in the clear light of truth. There was no fear of their position and power in what John had to say. We find also that he pointed them to the coming of Another, the One whom we know to be Jesus of Nazareth. What do you think the Pharisees really thought about John? See Matt. xxi. 23-27.

Second Day. The Sabbath. *Read Mark* ii. 23-iii. 6.

The first clash between Jesus and the Pharisees seems to have been in regard to the observance of the Sabbath. The seventh day was a day of rest. (Christians now use the first day of the week because on it Christ rose from the dead.) The law enjoined complete rest from work on that day. In order to be sure no work was done, the Pharisees insisted on minute laws which made the day of rest a burden

instead of a delight. People must always be thinking of what they were forbidden to do, instead of thinking of God with joy as a Father who wanted them to be happy. They would learn to associate the thought of God with stupid and irksome laws. This perverted the whole meaning of the day of rest. In the presence of Jesus it was impossible to think of God's day in such a way. How do you think the disciples came to do on the Sabbath what they had been taught from childhood was illegal? What was it in Jesus that made Him so careless about these special laws and prohibitions? Can you imagine a really good man, faced with a need which he could meet, and unwilling to meet it because of a legal or technical difficulty? Remember that Jesus in healing this man put Himself against all the leaders of religion. He showed that He did not admit their authority. Already we see what far-reaching consequences this action was to have. While a certain view of the Sabbath is criticized, what can we see here about its positive permanent value? What does this day's reading tell us about God?

THIRD DAY. LETTER OR SPIRIT. *Read Mark* vii. 1-13.

A part of the ritual prescribed by tradition was an exceedingly careful washing of hands before eating. The ritual was prescribed by the Pharisees not to avoid ordinary dirt but to wash away what might have touched their hands and caused defilement. Certain foods, for example, were unclean, and could not be eaten though perfectly wholesome. Jesus did not, of course, object to ordinary cleanliness,

but this extreme type of ritual seemed useless or even harmful. Why did Jesus object to it ?

Note the illustration He gives of the observance of a ritual which actually defeats God's elementary law of honouring your parents. Perhaps the Pharisees themselves hardly realized how far from truth this method of theirs had taken them. Do you think Jesus' condemnation may be regarded as an attempt to force open their eyes that they might see themselves ? Doubtless many criticisms of the Pharisees were made by the common people, but few, if any, would simply and fearlessly state the criticism to the men themselves. This is what Jesus did. To the Pharisee who listened, two possible reactions were open. What were they ? Which way did most of them take ?

Fourth Day. Undetected Evil. *Read Mark* viii. 11-21.

The passage opens with an incident which may have been a real attempt on the part of the Pharisees to find out the truth about Jesus. What reasons have you for thinking of it in a different way ? Notice the words " tempting Him," which are the explanation of the writer who had more chance of judging the real motives than we have. Note also the way in which Jesus met the enquiry. Had it been a genuine desire for more light, it seems likely that Jesus would have answered differently. Compare His way of dealing with the question of the woman at the well. (John iv. 19-24.)

The incident which follows on the lake shows where Jesus felt the chief danger of the Pharisees to lie.

His denunciation of them cannot have been only to open their own eyes to their falsehood and self-deception. He had another purpose. What was it? Leaven is put into the meal in order to produce a certain effect, but when that is produced the leaven itself can no longer be detected. It has done its work, and many might not even recognize what that work had been. There is something like this in evil influences in the world, and that is particularly true when standards of right are perverted and men come to accept as right what is really wrong or partly wrong. The whole idea of what God required of men had been perverted in men's minds by the outward and formal acceptance of law, and they were overawed by the apparent righteousness of these men. Jesus challenged the whole idea of goodness for which they stood. Was He right in doing so? (Cf. Matt. v. 20.) Was He justified in using very strong language to expose the danger? (See also Mark vii. 14-23, which immediately follows yesterday's incident.)

FIFTH DAY. DESPISING OTHERS. *Read Luke* xviii. 9-14.

The criticism of Pharisees is embodied in many sayings of Jesus, of which the chief collection is found in Matt. xxiii. In this brief parable, which was spoken *to* them, Jesus very frankly and firmly puts His finger on the sin which chiefly stirred Him. These men not only were very sure that they were right themselves, but this self-righteousness led to a certain attitude towards others. Compare this with the attitude which Jesus Himself took towards

the ignorant and sinful. It is hard to understand such strong words as Jesus used about the Pharisees. We must see them in the light of His tremendous love. The heart of the parable is in the words "or even as this publican." Imagine the scorn with which those words were said and then remember that Jesus earned the title "Friend of publicans and sinners."

Do we see modern examples of this scornful attitude? We might try to write this parable over again in terms of to-day. Do we find some signs of this scorn of the outcast and sinner in ourselves? If the spirit of Christ were dwelling in us more fully, what should we have in place of scorn? We miss the point of this week's study unless we seek to discover where the "leaven of the Pharisees" is getting into our own lives.

SIXTH DAY. THE ELDER BROTHER. *Read Luke* XV. 1, 2, 11-31.

The first two verses give the occasion on which the parables in this chapter were uttered. Note the complaint of the Pharisees and the justification which Jesus here gives of His own conduct, which is a reflexion of the attitude of God Himself to the lost and wayward. If the shepherd and the woman and the father can be so interested in the sheep, the coin and the child, how much more will God care for the outcast sinner.

The parable we have read contains more than a justification of Jesus' own attitude however. It pictures that of the Pharisees. The elder brother has lived in the father's home, assured of his position

and privileges, with no doubt about his own rectitude. The coming of his erring brother reveals the immense gulf that exists between the elder brother and the father. How would you express their different points of view or their difference in spirit ? Would it be true to say that while the elder brother has lived all these years in his father's house he has never understood his father ? When the test comes, how does he meet it ? The listeners could not fail to see whom Jesus had in mind when He brought the elder brother into the picture.

Seventh Day. A Test Case. *Read John* viii. 2-11.

This incident brings Jesus and the Pharisees into actual contact in relation to a specific act of sin and in relation to a person who has sinned. It may be taken as a picture from life to illustrate the parable we read yesterday. Note the moral indignation of these self-righteous men. Have we ever noted the same thing in ourselves ? They stand there angry with the woman and ready to kill her and eager to find the occasion for condemning Christ. If He is to let her off He will, in their view, be condoning sin. They have understood enough of His spirit to know that He is unlikely to stone her or permit them to do so.

Facing sin, what is the chief interest of (*a*) the Pharisees ; (*b*) Jesus Christ ? We cannot fail to note that Jesus, without condoning the woman's sin, transferred, if only for a moment, the judgment they passed upon the woman to themselves, causing the Pharisees to look inward instead of outward. When men are caused to face their own sin they will either

repent or resent the action which makes them do this. No doubt Jesus desired repentance, and knew that the risk He had to take in seeking for their repentance was that He would earn their bitter hatred. Does this help us to understand His whole attitude towards the Pharisees ?

Review of the Week.

The incidents we have studied form but a small part of the material in the Gospels which bears on the relation of Jesus to the Pharisees. We shall study later (Week XI) the development of the antagonism between the Pharisees and Jesus which culminated in His crucifixion. This week we want to consider what the actual relationship was; why Jesus spoke as He did to the Pharisees, and why they acted as they did towards Him. In this study we again get light upon the nature of God and upon the kind of men He would have us to be.

In the first place, there can be no doubt that Jesus saw with very clear eyes the actual danger to themselves and to society which was involved in the Pharisees' conception of goodness. It was part of His business in the world to give to men an idea of goodness, which means an idea of God, who is the source of all goodness. He came to a group of persons who had been taught to accept an idea of goodness which was very defective. What would you say were the chief defects in the idea of goodness which the Pharisees held, and which they imposed upon others ? Let us remember that it was not simply a question of denouncing hypocrisy that interested Jesus. He wanted to make absolutely

clear to men what is the real aim of life, what are the things worth striving for. The Pharisees were giving men an aim in many ways different from that of Jesus. He had to break down their authority in the moral field and help people to see that it rested on a complete misunderstanding about God and goodness. Could this be done without words that must have sounded very harsh ?

In addition to this aim Jesus surely desired to reach the hearts of these men themselves. A few seem to have responded, but most would not have the veil torn from their eyes. This very fact shows how deeply they were entrenched in their own ideas. The loss of face involved in accepting Jesus' ideas would have been tremendous. For these teachers and leaders to sit at the feet of a mere upstart from a little Galilean village, a carpenter's son, with no book-learning, a friend of publicans and sinners—unthinkable ! What Jesus wanted was to help them to see themselves. Do His words, as we read them to-day, help us to see ourselves ? Does this scorn of the false make us fear falsity in our lives ? Does this exposure of the danger of an outward religion drive us to seek truth in the inward parts ? Does this denunciation of contempt lead us to purge our lives of contempt for the sinning, and make us more humble and considerate ? Here is where there is lasting value in the words spoken to one class of people.

But Jesus also cared to liberate the common man from the domination of these false leaders. He saw that men were in chains because of the supremacy of the Pharisees and He would set them free. Only

by taking a very strong line, it would seem, could He break the fetters. An habitual acceptance of certain ideas needs a shock to break the habit and make men think for themselves and act for themselves, instead of accepting the standards imposed on them by others. Does the attitude of Jesus to the Pharisees lead us to the conclusion that God is desperately concerned that His children should think for themselves and face truth instead of doing what so many do, resting in the falsehood (or even in truths) which have been handed out to them by others ?

Could we not put down certain great ideas about God which have been made clear in this week's study ? They concern His attitude towards truth, towards self-deception, towards pride, towards thoughtless acceptance of the ideas of others, and so forth. The Jesus who met the Pharisees with such clear exposure of their sin and such fearless opposition to their assumed authority is the same Jesus who was so tender to the children and so considerate to Peter. It is all part of one complete revelation of what God is and of what man may become. We must never forget that the last word of Jesus about the Pharisees was spoken on the Cross : " Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

THIRD WEEK

JESUS AND THE HOME

Introductory Note.

It is always a great help to an understanding of any man to see him in his home and to know something of the home from which he came. We know very little of the home life of Jesus. As far as we can tell His home was similar to that of many village dwellers in Palestine. It can be assumed that there was no luxury or ostentation about it, and that there was no grinding poverty. Probably each member had to take his share of household duties and of work in the shop as he grew old enough to do so. Undoubtedly the parents were God-fearing people and the great traditions of His race would be cherished and explained to the growing children. This meant a very great deal to the Jewish child, for his national literature was full of thrilling stories of Abraham and Joseph and Moses and David; great prophetic figures like Elijah and Isaiah and Daniel would be the heroes of the Jewish boyhood. Shot through all the history was a sense of divine guidance and the unchanging care of God for His people. At the same time it would be clear that God was most of all concerned that His people should be righteous. Such deep impressions were made upon children in Jewish homes that they grew up with passionate love

of country and with a strong sense of God's protection, holiness and greatness.

Growing up in such a home, how did Jesus think about the responsibilities of home life? What were His relations to His own family circle? What effect in all His thinking and in His mature life had this environment upon Him? Can we discover any fresh light upon our problem—the revelation of God in Jesus and of man's possibilities—by studying this matter? These questions are not easily answered because the material is so scanty. But we have some clues which we shall try to follow in this week's study.

First Day. Jesus and His Parents. *Read Luke* ii. 40-52.

This is the first account we have of any action of Jesus in His own self-conscious life. In fact, it stands alone in about the middle of a period of thirty years, during which no other deed or word is on record. How much we would give to have other authentic stories of that boyhood! What impression do we get through this story of the chief interest of the life of the boy? We notice His complete absorption in the matters He was discussing and a boy-like forgetfulness of all else. His evident surprise that His actions could have caused any anxiety to others is also noticeable. What was so obvious to Him was strange to them; what was so clearly their chief anxiety never occurred to Him as a difficulty.

Do you think the incident affected the course of Jesus' life? May it be that it held Him back from a premature public life and reminded Him of the very serious claims upon Him of the family into

which He had been born ? Religious prodigies have been known in many lands and ages. Jesus had in Him capacities and intuitions which even at this age astonished learned men. But He had some things to learn through living among men and through accepting the conditions of His home life. (Compare Hebrews v. 8.) Later in life in regard to other matters He spoke of His time not having come. Perhaps the shock of finding how anxious His parents had been was an important factor in His spiritual history. In any case we have a picture of His growing life, and we are not left in doubt about His attitude to His parents.

Second Day. A Marriage Feast. *Read John* ii. 1-12.

Here we see Jesus joining in a family gathering, taking His part with His family as a regular guest and entering into the simple festivities. In this study we are not chiefly concerned with the miracle. We want to see how Jesus acted among these folk. He was no kill-joy, as some " religious " people are to-day. Not only did He share in the pleasures ; He made a distinct contribution to them. It can be said that the feast would not have been so successful if He had not been there.

In particular we notice His relation to His mother. She, on her part, knew her son well enough to believe Him able to meet the situation where others would have failed. Doubtless His thoughtfulness for others and His ready resourcefulness had appeared in the daily intercourse of the home life. What do you make of His first remark to His mother ? It seems

almost rude at first reading. Perhaps He saw that His exercise of His power in this place would tend to force Him upon public attention. He knew the public life must come soon, but not just yet. Note the last verse which shows that He was able, even after this miracle, to avoid publicity for a few days. But while shrinking from any premature act, He could not resist His mother's desire. He met her expectation of Him. What do you feel about the relationship of mother and son as you read this simple story ?

THIRD DAY. THE LARGER FAMILY. *Read Mark* iii. 20-35.

The incident recorded in the last few verses of this passage seems strange and difficult to reconcile with other stories that show Jesus' affection for His family. We must try to understand the object of His mother and brothers in seeking Him. The effect of His teaching upon people is already very marked, as we see from the earlier part of the passage. Note verse 21. Does this help to explain His family's purpose, as recorded at the close, and the reaction of Jesus to that purpose ? One thing is pretty clear, that at this point in His ministry His family were not in sympathy with His work. Try to fancy the effect which would be made upon your own mind if a brother whom you had known from childhood and whom you had thought to be little different from yourself, suddenly came out with strange new teachings and great powers of healing you had never suspected ; if he became a popular hero and at the same time the source of much criticism by the leaders. You might easily conclude him to be mad. It was such a

situation that confronted these brothers. They were unprepared for what they now saw.

To Jesus, it is clear, the family was a very important factor in human society. His words on this occasion serve to enlarge the sense of family obligation. Rather than making little of family ties, we should read this incident as widening the family sense. What principles would seem to apply in this widening? Jesus sought for those who through insight and devotion would really share His highest aims. Just prior to this incident he had chosen some (verses 13-19). Let us meditate on the implications of membership in this wider family.

FOURTH DAY. THE CHILD IN THE MIDST. *Read Mark* x. 13-16 *and Matt.* xviii. 1-6.

Jesus had a keen sense of the value of the child. In the home the children may be treated in many different ways—neglected, spoiled, kicked, fondled, and so forth. Do you think the passages we have read to-day make it clear how Jesus would treat a child in His home? What is the fundamental attitude towards the child which determined the way in which Jesus treated children? The eye of Jesus saw many things which others have missed, and it may be said that He saw in a way that few, if any, had seen before Him, the significance of the child. The future of any country is in the hands of its children. How little this is appreciated by many parents and others can be seen by many things that children are caused to suffer even to-day. While the sense of the value of the child has entered into our whole system of education and into legislation for

factories, etc., there are still many places where Christ's estimate of the child is neither accepted theoretically nor applied in practice. Have we got His idea about children ourselves, and do we realize its far-reaching implications ?

FIFTH DAY. DISREGARD OF PARENTS. *Read Matt.* XV. 1-9.

In this passage, which we have already studied in another connexion, we get some idea of the strong conviction of Jesus as to duty to parents. These men (the Pharisees) put a supposed duty to God before their duty to their father and mother. By calling their possessions " God's," they were absolved from using them to support their parents. Jesus clearly holds that a dedication to God which does not include a dedication to one's earthly parents is valueless. Part of God's plan for human life is the family, and therefore family loyalty is a definite part of our loyalty to God. If this is the conviction of Jesus, is it not easy to understand His deep indignation at the thought of those who taught people that they could neglect their parents as part of their service to God ? Let us remember that Jesus constantly used the word Father for God. What does that imply as to the home life of Jesus, His idea of the relation of parents to children, His actual relationship to His own parents ? Such a phrase could hardly be used by one who had an unkind, tyrannical, careless or immoral father. If we are to understand to-morrow's study we need to appreciate what Jesus thought of right relations between father and son.

SIXTH DAY. THE CLAIMS OF GOD. *Read Luke* ix. 57-62 *and* xiv. 25-35.

These passages, if taken alone, might lead us to think that Jesus put little value on home ties. In the light of our study this week can this be their true explanation ? In the teaching of Jesus we constantly discover the form of statement which makes us open our eyes and ask: Did He really mean this ? Then we are caused to think hard about the problem and to try to discover what He did mean. Jesus had the difficulty of speaking to people, many of whom, like many to-day, were not in the habit of thinking for themselves. Certainly they would wonder and perhaps be caused to turn away by hard sayings like these. But perhaps Jesus would rather have a few who understood than many who simply followed in idle curiosity or for what they could get. (Cf. John vi. 66-71.) Here we see that Jesus says what must make us open our eyes. What is the real meaning of it ? Only when we understand how deeply Jesus cared about the family life can we understand this saying. There is something even more tremendous in its claim upon you. What is it ? What is the difference between this teaching of Jesus and that of the Pharisees which He criticized so sharply in the passage we read yesterday ? Did they not also say that sometimes the claim of God is greater even than the claims of father and mother ?

SEVENTH DAY. JESUS PROVIDES FOR HIS MOTHER. *Read John* xix. 23-27.

The last words of a dying person are often regarded as significant and greatly treasured. Frequently he

speaks his deepest thought when he faces the great reality—death. So it has been rightly held that the seven brief utterances of Jesus on the Cross are extremely important in helping us to see into the heart of this great Teacher and Saviour. We note that even in this hour of extreme agony the thought of Jesus turned to His mother and He made provision for her need. The weight of the world was on Him, and the physical and spiritual anguish He endured is beyond our imagining. In these two sentences addressed to His mother and His dearest friend we catch a glimpse of the relations which existed between mother and son. Turn back to the joyful song of Mary, as recorded in Luke i. 46-55, and pass in review the thirty odd years that had intervened for her. Her rejoicing in the birth—all the rich promise that it held, her growing delight and wonder as the boy grew in stature and in favour with God and man, her constant questioning as to what the future held, as she pondered in her heart one thing after another, her temporary misunderstanding and desire to drag Him back to the sheltered and delightful home life, her deepening appreciation that His great destiny could only be fulfilled through pain—a pain which drove a sword into her own heart. Do you not think mother-love was a very important factor in the life of Jesus ? What kind of a home, then, will a Christian one be ?

Review of the Week.

The materials available in the Gospel story for judging of the relation of Jesus to His own home folk are, as we noted at the beginning, somewhat meagre.

We have tried to pick out the most important in the week's study. There are other sidelights which might be referred to here. Jesus' attitude towards women generally will be considered later, but it is eloquent of a deep and happy relationship to His mother (and presumably to His sisters) and a sense of the value of womanhood developed in His family life. Particularly we note His strong words in regard to divorce, which must be connected with an experience of the home that was happy in itself and that He regarded as according to the divine plan. (See Matt. v. 27-32.) Again we may note that one of the brothers of Jesus, James, not only became, in time, a believer in Him, but was actually a recognized leader. (Gal. i. 19.) A change clearly took place in him and in Mary after the incident we considered on the third day. It does not seem to be using our imagination too far when we say that this change was largely due to the deep impression made upon His family by the way Jesus had lived among them as a boy and a young man. At first they might think Him mad or even deceiving the people. But gradually they would come to realize that there had been some strangely beautiful and winning quality apparent even in the simplest daily life and intercourse of the same brother. They would see that this was in truth a preparation and forecast of what was later to happen. Reading back into the home life of boyhood and young manhood they found it to be consistent with the amazing claim made for and by this member of their family. (For an interesting imaginative treatment of this part of the life of Jesus, see *The Hidden Years*, by John Oxenham.)

To recognize the greatness and significance of the absolutely familiar is always hard. Perhaps to no one was it harder to accept Jesus as the unique Son of God than to those who knew Him so well and intimately. He had been no infant prodigy. The foolish tales of His boyhood found in apocryphal gospels are just the kind of thing later generations would make up, but they are quite out of keeping with what we know in other ways and with the situation described in the Gospels. Jesus in His home evidently was so truly a part of it, made so little of Himself, that the idea of His unique mission and message very slowly found an entrance into the minds of His family. But in the end it penetrated, because there was a deep inner unity in His life. Once the flower was seen, it was clearly the one flower that could be borne on such a plant. It had not been put on artificially. Jesus' ministry grew out of His home life as the bud unfolds on the stem.

What, then, have we to learn about God from this week's study? Can we understand something of His method with men? What are the qualities that are needed to make a good son and brother? What factors go to making a satisfactory home life? Have these anything to do with the nature of God as shown to us through Jesus Christ? We have seen that Jesus recognized a claim which is higher even than the family one. Would it be right to say that the family life will not be ideal unless its members do recognize a higher claim? The family is not an end in itself. It may easily be seen that family loyalty should contribute towards the well-being of the whole community. There are many cases where

a sense of family loyalty leads people to injure the nation. May we not see in this an aspect of the point which Jesus insists upon, that there is an ultimate loyalty to God and His Kingdom, and that even family claims cannot stand before that? God gives us family life to prepare us for the larger family in which He is Father. Jesus in His family life was prepared for the larger service of the world-family.

FOURTH WEEK

JESUS AND THE SICK

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

A large part of the story of Jesus is taken up with telling us how He dealt with sick people. His fame as a healer of diseases very soon spread all through the country. From far and near people came to Him. In healing them and in His other contacts with them Jesus is revealed to us. We see the man at work with other men and women. To many people sick folk are troublesome or even repulsive. They need so much attention: they seem always to be thinking of themselves: they make so big a claim on our sympathy: they may be troubled with infectious or repulsive illness that cause people to shrink from them. Of course, if it is our own friends or family who are ill we may think very differently. Anything we can do to help them will be gladly done: we take risks for their sake without fear: we do even more than the case actually demands: our sympathy is poured out without counting the cost. But even the illness of our own friends may be very trying to us, how much more that of others.

This week we shall take up a few of the stories in which we are told of the way in which Jesus dealt with sick folk and with their friends. We shall try to discover what were His feelings towards them,

how He was able to help them, and why they came to Him with such confidence and hope. In making this study we may also gain some idea as to why God allows illness in the world and what He means us to learn from it. If we see God in Jesus Christ we ought, in rather a special sense, to see Him in this very characteristic activity of Jesus while He lived among men. For whatever else anyone knew then or knows now about Jesus Christ, this much is clear that He did bring to men health ; and this, as we shall see, did not mean only health of body, but health also of mind and of spirit.

First Day. Forgiveness and Healing. *Read Mark* ii. 1-12.

This is one of the earliest incidents in the life of Jesus. Already He was popular and it was difficult to get near enough to hear Him. The record of the previous chapter, which we read in the first week, shows how rapidly the fame of Jesus had spread. We may notice in this story the following points : the faith which was exercised, and which Jesus commended, was that of the man's friends rather than his own : this faith expressed itself in action, which meant overcoming difficulties : Jesus' first concern is for the man himself in his inner life : the sensitiveness of Jesus to what is going on around Him (note : " Perceiving in His spirit ") : the relation between the challenge to His authority and the miracle of healing : the immediate response of the sick man.

Do you think the word of forgiveness was essential to the man's cure ? Perhaps his illness was a direct

result of sins in the past, or perhaps he connected it with them. This is the only instance on record where Jesus dealt first with a man's spiritual ills and only later with his bodily ones. But do you not think that the contact with Jesus which brought bodily health must, at the same time, have given spiritual health to many? Can you think of cases where this is indicated? This is by no means the only time, however, that the faith of another (or others) was, as far as we can see, the ground on which Jesus was able to effect a cure. Faith in some form was essential, as we see in many of the stories. If it is not always the faith of the sick person, what might be concluded about the value of prayer?

Second Day. Contrary to Expectations. *Read John* v. 1-18.

In this story Jesus finds the sick man. We have few cases on record where Jesus took the initiative in healing. In nearly all others He made a response to a definite request by the sufferer or his friends. Clearly Jesus was stirred by the sight of the sick people in this place. One wonders why He selected this man from among a great crowd. Can you form any idea of the answer to this question? Here we notice that the man was still expecting to be healed, but he was not expecting Jesus to heal him. The element of faith is found not in any attitude towards Jesus Himself, of whom he clearly knew nothing, but in the pathetic hope that brought him still after thirty-eight years of sickness to the side of the pool. The expectation of relief was there: the faith in Jesus Christ was absent. Yet the cure was effected.

May we see here an indication of the fact that Jesus was not limited to one channel in His work for men? Where God's eye sees sincere and humble hearts, the response of His love may surely be more complete and generous than many so-called Christian systems have assumed, extending to the individual who is outside the circle of the Church or ignorant of Jesus.

There is a dark side to this story. The opposition to Jesus was stimulated by His act of love and mercy. The man himself was so little grateful or understanding that he serves the ends of Jesus' enemies by telling who had cured him as soon as he himself knew, thus turning criticism from himself to his benefactor. What are we to say of such action?

THIRD DAY. DRIVING OUT FEAR. *Read Mark* v. 1-20.

This is one of a number of cases where Jesus was plainly dealing with the mind rather than the body. A diseased mind takes many forms, and these were commonly spoken of under the term "devil possession." What kind of devil possessed this man? One thing, at least, is clear, that fear was an important part of the trouble. His condition would be strange and caused fear in his friends. They try to chain him, and treat him in so cruel a way as to inspire more fear in him. Things go from bad to worse, until every person is a fresh object of terror. To the terror-stricken, Jesus brought release. He had no fear and His perfect love cast out fear (1 John iv. 18). So He brings release to this man. "Torment me not," is the cry of the man who is possessed by fear. The quiet strength and gentle words of Jesus drive

forth the terror. The devil has left him, and those who only meet fear with fear are themselves terrified, because they have seen something new—a power they had not reckoned with, a love beyond their knowledge.

The story of the swine is difficult to understand. May it be that something happened to frighten them, and that Jesus, seeing the cause of their mad rush, used the occasion to point out that the same devil of fear that had possessed the man was now driving them into the sea? How do you account for Jesus sending the man back to his home when he was so eager to come with Jesus? Can you understand the desire of the neighbours that Jesus should depart? (Read Chapter I in *By an Unknown Disciple*, in elucidation of this incident, on lines indicated above.)

FOURTH DAY. MANIFESTATION OF POWER. *Read Mark* v. 21-43.

These two stories, which are so closely related, show Jesus using His great power in new ways, in one case unconsciously giving His strength and health to an invalid and in the other lifting a child from the actual hand of death. Let us think first of the woman. We notice that she came unseen, and that Jesus can have taken no active part in the cure. He insists at the close, "*Thy* faith hath made thee whole." Was it, then, simply that and nothing more? How do you account for the sense of loss of power which Jesus had? There seems to have been something like the drawing off of blood from the body. Perhaps in this higher field of transfer of spiritual power there are laws we know nothing of. Can you

discover the purpose of Jesus in bringing this trembling, shy woman to the front ? Did she leave with added reassurance after the words of Jesus had been spoken to her.

It seems, perhaps, unbelievable that Jesus should actually raise from the dead ! To probe the secret of that power may well be beyond us. But the idea of men flying or speaking to one another across thousands of miles seemed equally impossible to our forefathers. Yet these things have been done through discovery and obeying laws of Nature. Was Jesus not obedient to the laws of His Father ? May it be that He perceived laws of which we know nothing ? We note here His readiness to come, His unwillingness to work in public, perhaps the need of a sympathetic and believing group around Him, His gentleness with the child, His thought for her after she was restored.

Fifth Day. Calling out Faith. *Read Mark* vii. 24-37.

The two stories contained in this passage have also something in common. In many cases Jesus responded at once to a request. Here we have two cases where something was interposed between the request and the response. In the first instance Jesus seems harsh in His first answer. Do you think there was any hesitation in the mind of Jesus in healing the child ? If not, what can have been His object in the first refusal or half-refusal ? We notice that this was one of several instances where the person healed was not present and the faith exercised had to be by another on her behalf (cf. Matt. viii. 5-13).

We have a similar delay in the response in the case of the dumb man. Judging by other miracles, does it not seem a little strange that Jesus should take the man aside, and that He should use the means recorded for effecting the cure ? There are only one or two other cases where, as far as our records go, any outward means were used. Can you think of a reason for such action ? If Jesus did not need to use these means, may they have had some value for the man himself ? We remind ourselves again that Jesus had to use laws and powers which we do not understand. There may be a connexion deeper than we think between the act of Jesus in a case like this and the result achieved. It is very difficult to establish contact with a man who is deaf and dumb.

Sixth Day. Possibilities of Faith. *Read Mark* ix. 14-29.

The setting of this incident is especially interesting. The father of the boy comes looking for Jesus. He finds only a group of His disciples. But these are men who have previously been working miracles and might be expected to have power to cure the boy. They, however, are powerless. Jesus, with three others, is away on the mountain-top. Here He is facing the grim realities of death, and being strengthened to meet the fierce trials which are soon to come to Him. When He returns to the little helpless group, faced with the epileptic boy and his father, all eyes at once turn to Him. Around the chief actors are gathered many others, perhaps in idle curiosity, perhaps anxious to test whether this reputed healer could deal with so strange and

stubborn a case. Why do you think the multitude were amazed when they saw Jesus ? Had they not been expecting Him ?

Jesus at once sees that something is wrong and asks for an explanation. Out steps the father, full of his own troubles and of complaints of the impotence of the disciples. Note the indication of Jesus' struggle with Himself. How often must Jesus have felt inclined to despair of the slowness of men to see what to Him was clear as daylight (cf. Luke xxiv. 25). The inability to effect a cure in this case seems not to have been with the father but with those to whom he first came. Read Matt. xvii. 19-20, where the point is made more clear. What is the idea of prayer which this incident brings to your mind ?

Seventh Day. Light for Body and Soul. *Read John* ix. 1-41.

This story gives us in considerable detail the events connected with one cure. It shows several aspects of Jesus in His dealing with men. First, we have Him answering the problem about the cause of sickness in the world. He refuses to connect it with sin. How does this strike you ? Is there, then, no connexion between sin and suffering ? Secondly, we have a further case of His use of means. The man had to do something himself in order that the power to heal him could be effective. It reminds us of the story of Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings v.), where at first the very simple thing the leper was to do seemed too simple and was not done. Can we draw any conclusion from this part of the story

as to the one way in which faith is brought into action? Later we have the contact between the man and the Pharisees. This ignorant blind man saw what they could not or would not see. They closed their eyes to facts because they did not wish to see the truth.

When Jesus finds him again the man is ready to take a further step of faith. Is it any wonder that he worshipped Him? Do you think we can draw any conclusion from the fact that Jesus accepted the worship? Note the last verse in the chapter. Many we know have not seen things which we see, but what of us who have seen? We come back to a thought about sin. Compare the idea of Jesus with the conviction about sin which prompted the question in verse 2.

Review of the Week.

Let us look back in our mind at the series of pictures which we have studied through the week. In nine incidents Jesus has met with those who needed help from Him. Has the help ever been refused? In one or two cases there is delay in meeting the need. This we have seen may have served a distinct purpose. But the delay has been trivial compared with the gains which have come to those who have sought the help of Jesus. Let us try to gather together in our mind those characteristics of Jesus which this series of events illustrate. There is compassion, a large sympathetic heart open to the cry of the needy, even eager to see where help can be given; what an impression we gain of this gentle, loving, tender-hearted man! There is strength, a power beyond

what we know, a power used to help others, a power that is not withheld, although it costs the giver something, a power that seems limitless, even calling one back from death, a power related in some way to the power of creation, the power of God Himself, a power which Jesus believes we may exercise. There is insight to see the real needs of those who come to Him, to meet not only the outward but also the inward ills, to see each one as a separate person, and take his case in the best way, an insight born of love. There is faith. What does this mean in Christ? How does He call it forth in others? We have seen the need of a connexion between the giver and the receiver. How would you describe that? The presence of Jesus seems to call out from people powers of which they were scarcely if at all aware. Jesus lived in the same world we live in, bounded by all kinds of conventions and ideas that tend to limit us. Yet He also lived in another world realizing God, the Father, as a free agent ever ready to hear the call of His children and able to meet their needs in rich and overflowing measure.

Does it seem to us that the contact of Jesus with sick folk opens up to us some aspects of the divine method in the world as well as the divine nature? Do we see prayer in a new light as we think of Jesus, the man of prayer, for whom the hidden yet mighty forces of the universe were an instrument ever ready to His hand? Jesus who lived in this world of wonder did things that to us seem wonderful and indeed impossible. Are we not able to live in that world? Is it not the purpose of God that we should do so? Perhaps the words of Jesus come to us with

a fresh meaning: "Oh ye of little faith. . . If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you." In the light of this week consider again the saying: "He is the revelation of what God is, and of what man through Him may become."

FIFTH WEEK

JESUS AND THE ENQUIRING MIND

Introductory Note.

It was not only the bodily sick who came to Jesus. It soon became clear to His contemporaries that He had also something to say to the spiritually sick. As is the case in all parts of the world to-day, there were many people in Galilee then who were dissatisfied. Some were complaining of outward conditions, and thought that if only these might be changed all would be well. But others saw that there was something wrong with themselves. There were people who sought truth and did not find any satisfying answer in current philosophy. There were those who sought comfort and no one came to speak the word of consolation and hope. There were those whose evil life weighed upon them and they felt themselves to be in chains. How would Jesus deal with such? Could He really help them? When He spoke, did they feel that He knew what He was talking about, that the hope He gave them was genuine? Did they find any new power to live the life which they desired to live in their best moments? If Jesus had any help for such people, can we also say that God is a Father who, in His own way, provides help to the needy?

This week we shall see how Jesus faced the mental

and spiritual needs of men. It may stimulate us, too, for we remember that He lived the kind of life men are meant to live. We may find that we are called by His life to a deeper kind of service to our fellow-men. Anyhow, let us look and learn.

First Day. Jesus announces His Mission. *Read Luke* iv. 16-22.

Before we take separate cases we may look at the way in which Jesus faced His task. In the synagogue of His home town He reads a passage which He clearly regards as referring to Himself. We may turn to Isaiah lx.; and see that the passage is chosen carefully, and that He stopped (can we not say deliberately ?) at the point where another clause would have included a different thought which perhaps He did not regard as applicable to Himself.

Why do you think everyone looked at Him so intently after He had read these few words, and even before He explained them ? There must have been some appreciation of the significance of the man and the occasion. Was it fear that He would upset their traditions and lives ? Was it hope that perhaps He would answer their deepest longings ? Was it just wonder at they knew not what ? We may have different views on these questions and yet be agreed on one thing which the story indicates beyond doubt, that Jesus selected these words in order to make clear what He felt to be His mission and work in the world. When a man speaks sincerely and simply about the deepest things, and with great conviction, people take notice. If a man came to our town, village or home with such a message, should we not want to

hear him ? These words from Isaiah as we read them to-day can scarcely fail to turn our thoughts to the inner and spiritual needs. Would we not give much to hear them uttered to-day with the same conviction and tenderness ?

SECOND DAY. JESUS AND NATHANAEL, A TRUE ISRAELITE. *Read John* i. 43-51.

Many people who heard about Jesus were not at all prejudiced in His favour. Perhaps they regarded Him as an impostor, perhaps simply as self-deceived. Here is a man who supposed that the origin of Jesus alone was enough to discredit Him. Many people of obscure origin have become great. Nevertheless, there are those who still think that such an origin is enough to decide that a person is not worthy to be heard.

Jesus did not argue with Nathanael. He did not try to show him what a foolish prejudice he had. He recognized that Nathanael had, in some measure, overcome that prejudice since he had been willing to respond to Philip's suggestion to " Come and see." This is the scientific attitude. Many scientists have had to put aside prejudices. Their success began when they did this and looked into the matter for themselves. Would it be true to say that Jesus appreciates the scientific attitude of mind ?

Jesus shows Nathanael something. We do not know what was in Nathanael's mind when he was under the fig-tree. Perhaps it was some great struggle when he put aside temptation. Whatever it was, in a flash, it all comes back to him. Jesus helps him to see himself, and perhaps the words show

an appreciation of the victory he has won over himself—" An Israelite in whom is no guile." That was high praise. Does God then credit us with all that is best in us ? It seems too good to be true for there is much else. We need not be surprised that Nathanael acknowledged Him.

THIRD DAY. JESUS AND NICODEMUS, A SECRET ENQUIRER. *Read John* iii. 1-15.

Here is a very different type of enquirer. He also is prejudiced against Jesus, but not on just the same grounds. What do you think was the cause of his prejudice ? Whatever it was he overcame it enough to come to Jesus, though he dare not come in the daytime. He is rather patronizing. Perhaps he does not mean all he says, but at least he wishes to be polite, and he feels that he may be more likely to get what he wants if he begins by a recognition of the value of Jesus' teaching.

Jesus pulls him up very sharply. The thought behind what Jesus said may be something like this: If you are ready to admit that I come from God, and feel that My miracles prove it, will you be equally ready when I tell you the distasteful truth ? Nicodemus is unprepared for anything so revolutionary as is this simple truth: " Ye must be born again." He listens with growing wonder. " How can these things be ? " What is the real cause of the wonder ? Has it anything to do with the self-assurance of this " teacher of Israel " and his unreadiness to admit unfamiliar truth, especially where it involved a heavy cost to himself ?

The method of Jesus must have succeeded here

too. Look up John vii. 50-52. Note that the objection to Christ (that He came out of Galilee) is precisely that of Nathanael (with the change from the village to the district). Simply prejudice! But Nicodemus was himself very distinctly prejudiced and his attitude has changed. Why? See also John xix. 39. Clearly something happened to this man because of his talk with Jesus. How would you describe the change?

FOURTH DAY. JESUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN: A CASUAL MEETING. *Read John* iv. 1-15.

Again prejudice has to be overcome. To what two causes was it due in this case? See verses 9 and 27. This time there is no evidence that the woman did anything to overcome it; she simply accepted the situation, expecting prejudice in Jesus which she discovered not to be there. We can at least say this, that she did not allow any surprise or doubt on her part to stand in the way once she saw that Jesus was unprejudiced.

Here we see that the person who met Jesus was not apparently conscious of her own need and certainly did not come in order to have it met. She was found by Him, instead of going to find Him. He might have sat on and let her draw her water and go away again. Many would have done that. Others would have spoken of the weather or general topics of interest and never given her a chance for expressing her soul's need and hunger. From the trivial, Jesus moved to the significant. From the temporal He quickly passes to the eternal. A casual meeting by the side of a well—a thirsty stranger—

a woman with a water-pot—what material out of which to make an incident, full of meaning for all people, repeated and remembered in every land after 2000 years! How does it come to be so worthy of remembrance? Note with what a sure hand Jesus touches this woman until she opens up to Him her inmost thoughts.

FIFTH DAY. JESUS AT THE WELL: THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE MEETING. *Read John* iv. 16-42.

We continue the account of Jesus' talk with the woman. We note how she admits her sin and then how she opens up the great question which has troubled her. In different forms how many ask what is really the same question, "How can I be sure of God?" To her the puzzle came because the two authorities known to her differed. Each was so sure of being right. Where, after all, is God? Here at last she has met someone who knows. What a surprising answer! Neither is right. God is not confined to certain places or limited by our prejudices. Sincerity can find Him anywhere. The woman realizes at once, with quick intuition, that this surprising reply must be right. After all how could God be confined to a well or to a city? Why had she never thought of it before?

The woman at once becomes a propagandist. Here is something to be shared. There is no thought now of the cause which brought her to the well. Leaving her water-pot she is away to share the good news with her friends. Jesus meets them, too, in an understanding way. Very soon they see that He has

"the words of life." The woman's testimony is confirmed in their own experience.

What does this whole incident show as to Jesus' feeling about race distinction and sex distinction? Does it throw any light upon His estimate of human nature? Would you have supposed that a truth so profound and far-reaching as that stated in verse 24 would have been first spoken to an alien woman of little education and doubtful life?

SIXTH DAY. JESUS AND ZACCHÆUS: A DETERMINED MAN. *Read Luke* XIX. 1-10.

In many cases where Jesus comes into contact with men and women we find some barrier to be overcome. This man is a collector of taxes, serving the military power of Rome which all patriots detested. He was therefore despised as the slave of imperialists. In addition he seems to have been extortionate, taking what was not his. He used his position to defraud the poor. What an unpleasant character!

To Jesus he is a man to be sought out and saved. He is even "a son of Abraham," a high title to use to the man who is supposed to have sold his birthright. Jesus notices him, speaks to him, goes to his house, brings him friendship and hope. Clearly He believed in a better Zacchæus than the crowd could see. This belief helps to create the new man. His high resolve is given in verse 8, and Jesus acknowledges it by a generous word. Salvation, indeed, has come to the man who so responds to the presence of the Master.

It is highly probable that this incident turned away many of the crowd from Jesus. They wanted a

popular hero to lead them against Rome. Here in Zacchæus is a servant of the tyrant, and Jesus actually singles him out to pay honour to him. How could a man guilty of such an act satisfy the popular demand? Do you think Jesus did this deliberately, realizing the consequences? What does this incident show about the method of Jesus in dealing with evil?

SEVENTH DAY. JESUS AND THE LAWYER: A SUPERCILIOUS VISITOR. *Read Luke* x. 25-37.

In this story we have the record of one who came to test Jesus. In fact he was not a sincere enquirer. Many people would turn away from such an one and would not treat him with respect. They would say that he did not deserve it.

The attitude of Jesus is quite different. He speaks to him seriously. He asks him a question which shows the extent of His own knowledge of the law, and indeed His appreciation of values in the choice of this passage. The enquirer is made to realize that he has in his own mind the material for an answer to his question. He stands before Jesus evidently ashamed of having come, in this light way, to try to catch Him. But he wants to justify himself. He has lost face. He thinks the further question, "Who is my neighbour?" will help him to regain it. Even then Jesus does not put him off. He might have said, "You know that as well as I do." On the contrary, He tells him this beautiful story which throws new light on the problem. Surely this man went away with something to think about! The neighbour was the man he was in a position to help.

The barriers might be ever so great, his contempt for the other might be extreme. But the needy man had a claim upon him. If he refused to acknowledge and respond to that he was, by his own act, shutting himself out from eternal life. Let us ask ourselves afresh, "Who is my neighbour?" Perhaps it is someone I am neglecting as much as the priest and Levite neglected the fallen man.

Review of the Week.

Five interviews with enquirers have been read this week. In each case the conversation touches the inner secrets of the person's life and the deep truths of the Kingdom of God. Can we discover certain facts which are made clear in each interview? It will be helpful to compare them in regard to such matters as the attitude of the person towards Jesus, the opening of the talk, the way in which Jesus leads the person to look in on himself, the message which comes to the individual through the talk, the conclusion we can draw about Jesus from the particular record.

No doubt in all these cases much more was said than is recorded, the Gospel story being remarkable for condensation and the power to give a living picture in a few significant phrases. A little imagination may be used to expand the story and help us to feel with the enquirer in each case, Nathanael in his incredulous wonder and sudden conviction, Nicodemus in his patronizing goodwill and amazed comments, the woman at the well light and superficial, becoming serious in her self-revelation, Zacchæus intensely eager and responsive to the trust that was put in

him, the lawyer, self-assured and cynical, but leaving with a subdued sense that he had met his master. Then we may picture Jesus as He met each one giving His best thought, determined to discover the real man beneath the outer shell, helping the person to see himself both in his need and in his great possibilities. Where the enquirer is already, perhaps because of social ostracism as in the case of Zacchæus, acutely aware of his own failure and need, Jesus seems to spend little time in pointing it out and helping him to see it. Where he is self-assured (Nicodemus, the lawyer) he is led by a direct path to the place of self-accusation and confession. "They that are whole," said Jesus, "have no need of a physician." But the method of Jesus shows how those who thought themselves whole were led to discover their sickness. Perhaps nothing impresses us more than the variety in the method of Jesus. His words fit the particular case. There is nothing cut and dried about them. Here is a man, get alongside of him, think as he thinks and a way will appear by which you may lead him to a place of repentance or to the path towards higher things. That seems to be the method of Jesus. Is it also the way of the Father who speaks to us in this human life? What more can we say, as we ponder these five stories, about the way of God with His children?

SIXTH WEEK

JESUS AND WOMEN

Introductory Note.

It is generally conceded even by the critics of Christianity that no one has done more to raise the status of women than has Jesus Christ. His teaching has comparatively little direct reference to womanhood save in the one matter of marriage relations. Here it is evident that He regarded man and woman as subject to the same divine laws. There is no hint of the "double standard" virtually accepted by society and by very many individuals. The standard is equally high for both sexes, and is a very high one indeed, for Jesus has even said, "Everyone that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. v. 28). Jesus makes no provision for what many regard as inevitable lapses from purity. Is not this largely because He thinks always of the woman at least as much as of the man?

In these studies we are not chiefly concerned with the teaching of Jesus but with His human contacts, and it is in these that we find His chief contribution to the higher view and the better treatment of womanhood. Already we have seen something of Jesus' relation to His mother, and two contacts with women have been studied. In this week we go over

some of the ground covered, but look into much new material. Each contact is a revelation of the thought of Jesus in relation to women.

First Day. A Widow comforted. *Read Luke* vii. 11-17.

This simple incident breathes the spirit of Jesus. The miracle is utterly unexpected. It is one of the very few cases where no appeal is made to Jesus to do anything. His action is simply the overflow of His loving nature. The widow is overcome with grief and has no thought of seeking help. Perhaps a question to one of the mourners or onlookers reveals the poignant story—a widow, an only son her stay and support, the sudden hand of death, all her neighbours moved with pity but powerless to help.

We have already seen that the healing ministry was exercised at a certain physical cost to Jesus. How much greater the price He must pay for bringing back one from the power of death itself. But He does not hesitate. His characteristic first word is to the bereaved mother, "Weep not." It almost seems as if the young man were quite a secondary consideration. The deed of mercy centres around the woman in her loneliness and grief. "And he gave him back to his mother." The priceless gift which, as we read the story, seems to be so easily given! Yet it must have been a gift for which the Master paid in life energy. His object is achieved, a woman is comforted, a mother is given back her child. To Jesus she is of supreme importance. Does not every bereaved mother find here something of peculiar solace?

SECOND DAY. A WOMAN'S TEARS. *Read Luke* vii. 36-50.

Here is another of the delicate touches—Jesus in contact with a sinful woman is not defiled, as they supposed, but glorified in lifting up the fallen. Their conception of a holy man is of one who cannot touch evil: His idea is that of one who came to touch it with a tender and redeeming hand. There is no record of any request from the woman. Apparently she has the quick instinct which tells her that here is one who can help her and will not spurn her. She expresses her faith in an act of pure love. She is not disappointed. Jesus accepts the gift as an expression of repentance. Between Him and this sinful woman a subtle bond exists. In a certain sense she is more akin to this pure and sinless man than to the self-righteous Pharisee. Why should this be so? If sin separates from God, should we not expect so notorious a sinner to be cut off from the God-like person to whom she came?

Let us try to picture the whole scene as if we had never heard of it before, and ask ourselves whether we should not have shared Simon's amazement and even disgust. Seeing what Jesus did, it is so easy to approve His act and to judge the attitude of His host as faulty. Instinctively we are on the side of Jesus. But do we not, in practice, very often side with Simon? Have we no contempt for the notorious sinner, especially for such women? Do you think Jesus' attitude to this woman is, in part, an expression of His sense that, in such cases, the fault is the man's not less, perhaps more, than the woman's?

THIRD DAY. A DESPISED WOMAN. *Read John* viii. 2-11.

We have studied this incident as indicating the attitude of Jesus to the Pharisees. We may think of it to-day as it illustrates His attitude towards womanhood. Contrast it with yesterday's story. This woman is publically exposed. No question can arise as to her guilt. She has not come of her own free will. She is dragged, ashamed and unresisting, before Jesus as to a judge of morals.

How easy it is to accept the world's condemnation of sin. Actually men are more concerned with the exposure of sin than with the remedy of sin. Is that the case with Jesus? However, if people can sin without being discovered, they are often applauded in private by the very people who would join in the chorus of condemnation on such a woman as this.

To Jesus the public disclosure of the sin is secondary. The main thing is that men and women should see their own sin. Public disapproval may be needed to open men's eyes. But it is only a means to an end, and the end is—what? In the face of this sinning and exposed woman, note the delicacy of Jesus. No word of condemnation; the averted gaze as He writes on the ground, sharing the surprise. "Did no man condemn thee?" Finally there is the simple word of release and advice. We can imagine the succession of emotions in the woman, her act, its discovery, the dreadful publicity, the amazing words of Jesus and their result on the accusers, the few minutes of solitude with Him, the intense relief, the resolution to be worthy of such

a confidence. Is womanhood not lifted up by this story and given a ground of hope, an assurance that there is something friendly in the universe—even to the crushed and sinning? So often and so universally condemned, justly and unjustly, she hears down the ages, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go thy way: sin no more."

FOURTH DAY. FRIENDSHIP WITH TWO SISTERS. *Read Luke* x. 38-42 *and John* xi. 17-33.

The relation of Jesus with the family at Bethany was clearly very intimate. The two sisters, so different, yet each so devoted to their friend, and so confident of His love and power, are among the most interesting characters in the Gospel. We see Martha full of energy, showing her love by making every preparation, executive and efficient, determined that nothing shall lack in the entertainment of their friend, a fine strong housewife. We see Mary tender and clinging, thinking little (as we might say too little) about efficiency and the necessary preparations, but unwilling to lose a minute of the precious company, seizing every word spoken, loving the silences when she could sit by Jesus and just feel His wonderful presence. For such a luxury Martha has no time if she is to do her duty. For such duty Mary has no thought if she is to be with her friend. She knows He would rather have her than the things she can do for Him. Do you feel a touch of harshness in the words of Jesus? Did He fail to see that Martha was expressing her devotion in her own way? Perhaps her fussiness was for things that really mattered not at all. What He wanted was the

simplest fare and, above all, herself. He cared for the company of this woman, not for what she could do for His comfort so much as for the spiritual intercourse.

In the passage in John we see how deep that intercourse was. Here again, as in the talk by the well, we find Jesus opening up deep truths to women. No slightest trace can be seen that Jesus felt them to be on a lower plane than men either spiritually or intellectually. Yet are there not many religious people who assume this ?

Fifth Day. Is it Waste ? *Read John* xii. 1-8.

This incident seems to be a different one from that studied on the second day, though the accounts make it rather difficult to determine this. However, here the emphasis is very different. Mary, the grateful sister, brings the costly ointment out of an overflowing heart of love. Presumably the family was not a wealthy one, and the gift meant real self-denial. Jesus accepts it. Love is not a one-sided thing. If we give we must also, on the right occasion, receive. Otherwise the giving may well become patronizing.

Round Jesus stood the indignant disciples who have been living on a minimum fare with the Master who " had not where to lay his head." They know the home whence Mary comes. Need we wonder if her act appears as sinful waste ? Why did Jesus not so regard it ? Why does it call out so enthusiastic a comment ?

Again we seem to find something peculiarly choice in the appreciation of Jesus for a woman's act. Many

would look at it cynically and critically. To Him its beauty appeals. He sees behind the act the intensity of love. The idea of a rebuff to such an act of gratitude and devotion is utterly repugnant to Him. Here is a love that does not count the cost. Have we ever done, or seen done, anything which a critical world might call or has called foolish waste, and which in the eyes of a loving friend seems a supremely beautiful act ? If so we can appreciate this story.

Sixth Day. Values reversed. *Read Mark* xii. 38-44.

Jesus has been having a stiff conflict with His opponents. At every point they are trying to catch Him up. At last He turns on them and, as part of His accusation, He refers to their attack upon the defenceless widow, an attack which is cloaked by their long prayers as well as by their long robes ! It may well be that, on the pretext of raising money for religious purposes these leaders, like the priests in many religions to-day, were draining away the resources of the very poor. If so, this would add point to the incident which follows. Their lordly gifts to God do not blind His eyes to their denial of the law of love. Worthless generosity and empty prayers are all that can be expected from those who are merciless to the widow and fatherless.

Then His eye catches sight of one of these very widows. Quietly she steals up to the treasury and, as if ashamed of her minute gift, slips in the two mites. The act is seen at its true worth by eyes that ever pierce the sham. She is held up as the really

generous one, while the big givers are put in the second place.

Is not this an absurd reversal of values? Could any business be run on such principles? Is there any sense in offending the rich, who have so much power to help or hinder? Jesus has His own standard of judgment, and again we find it is a woman who has won His approval. The power to deny herself for God, the love that offers what it can and instinctively realizes that it will be accepted, is again a woman's. Contrast and compare this with the previous incident. Again the critical may say, "What waste!" for even these two mites are to her a day's meat and drink—how ill she can afford it!

SEVENTH DAY. IN THE GARDEN. *Read Mark* XV. 40, 41 *and John* XX. 1-18.

We come to the closing scenes of Jesus' life. Almost the only friends of Jesus to stand by Him were women. His disciples fled. The women remained with hearts tortured. They could not leave Him in His last terrible plight. How eloquent of His relation to these women are His few words! These were His close friends who went with Him to care for Him and had brought Him we know not how much of comfort and strength in His life of strenuous service for others. So the curtain falls, leaving the little band of faithful women standing by the Cross.

But it is to rise again. It shows us the garden tomb, and who should be there first but women? How eloquent again of their relation to Jesus and all that He has meant to them. Those whom He

raised from sin and shame, those to whom He gave a new sense of dignity, those to whom He had opened the deep mysteries of life. They cannot forsake Him, they are up early to visit the tomb. And so it comes about that to one of them the Risen Lord speaks His first word. What change had taken place that she did not know Him we cannot say. But we can scarcely miss the tenderness of the personal name, the well-loved inflexion of the voice that opens her eyes and enables her to see that wonder of all wonders, Jesus Christ alive whom she last saw dead upon the Cross. Read over carefully His words—they breathe the same spirit as of old: "My Father and your Father," identifying Himself with her and her with Himself. As always, Jesus knew how to lift up a woman with His tender strength.

Review of the Week.

May we think back over the various contacts with women which are recorded in the Gospels. They include not only those studied this week but also Jesus' relation to His own mother, His curing of sick women and their friends, the talk with the woman at the well. Do you think of any other great religious teacher whose contacts with women were so full of meaning and formed so important a part of his life?

The Christian Church cannot claim fully to have appreciated and followed the example of her Master. The place of women in the Church has been very lowly and is still only partially accorded. In the Church a double-standard morality has been accepted virtually, if not in theory. Women's education has lagged sadly behind that for men. Yet with all these

faults it is fair to say that the place of women in the world's life and her rights in social and family life have been won largely through those who have caught the spirit of Jesus. There is something dynamic in His treatment of women, and we have not yet completely worked out all that it means for society as well as for woman herself.

What do we find in these stories which helps to correct ideas of womanhood which have too often prevailed ? We know that the idea is not uncommon in some lands that women have no souls. We know that many people justify acts on the part of men which degrade women, and a state of society which condemns a certain class of woman always to be the slaves of the passion of men. We know that many who do not justify this, nevertheless think of woman as a mere plaything or one to be amused and humoured, or at best as of value almost entirely because she is the mother of man ! Do we find anything in these stories which challenges such views of woman and the relation of the sexes ?

Let us go further and see how in these stories woman stands out as pre-eminent in certain respects. What are these ? Is it not significant that some of the conversations and incidents where women figure cannot be duplicated by anything quite similar where a man is the central figure. No example of gratitude and overflowing love can quite equal the story of the anointed feet. No case is given of such complete self-denial as that of the widow who gave " all her living." Perhaps these and similar comparisons between the stories of men and women may come as a challenge to all to recognize the fact that God

our Father sets a very high value upon His daughters. To Him they are at least as dear as His sons. When we look at the life of Jesus can we possibly doubt it ?

We may well ask ourselves, we men at any rate—whether we are virtually denying this in some of our assumptions in our acceptance of the world's standards, in our actual treatment of the women we know.

SEVENTH WEEK

JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES: (1) THE CALL

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

In the Gospels we find a very great deal of material for the understanding of Jesus' treatment of His disciples. In fact a large part of His ministry may be said to have had for its first object the training of a small group of people who would be able to carry on His work after He had left them. There can be no doubt that this was a very prominent thought in the mind of the Master. Other great teachers have realized the same thing. Everyone knows how much of the strength of Confucius, for example, was devoted to conversations with his small circle of disciples. If such men can but catch the vision of their Master his words will live, carried on through their lives—a medium even more important than written words.

The method which Jesus used has been studied by many. One of the most recent discussions of it can be found in the findings of the Jerusalem meeting and in Canon Raven's book, *Christ and Modern Education*, arising out of that meeting. This outline will follow, in a general way, the thoughts there presented. It is historical, showing the development in the relations between Jesus and His closest friends, using the incidents recorded to help us to understand

that development. It will be necessary in this case to give several weeks to the study, but it will well repay the continued effort to master the subject.

FIRST DAY. THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. *Read John* i. 19-34.

The first followers of Jesus were found among those who had heard and accepted the message of His great forerunner, John the Baptist. In meeting strange people an introduction by a mutual friend is of great value. It gives one the right start. Picture the group of men standing round John. He is a strange figure, rather wild, and almost fierce in appearance and language. Yet these men have been fascinated by him and, what is more, they have seen in him a prophet sent from God. His words have very great weight with them. They ring true, spoken with a passion for right and out of a great vision of eternal things.

Into the group comes another person, less striking at first sight, clothed in the ordinary garments of His day and station in life. He stands among them listening, when the words of the preacher change their character. Instead of denouncing he is answering a question as to who he is. The crowd demands an explanation. They expect he will make a great claim for himself. On the contrary, he disclaims any high position for himself, but claims something very wonderful for someone who is actually among them unrecognized.

The next day the reference is still clearer. He picks out the man. All his work is but a preparation for this other. In His presence he feels unworthy.

He is willing and ready to see this other increase while he himself decreases. (John iii. 28-30.)

Second Day. The first Call. *Read John* i. 35-42.

Is it surprising that these men who had heard the words spoken by John about Jesus should want to hear more? In this story we have told simply how they made their investigations. Wonder had been stirred in their hearts. They can scarcely believe John's testimony to be true, but at least they must know more of this stranger. The first request seems very simple, just to know something of His manner of life. We notice that Jesus at once meets the enquiry not by telling them the answer, but by giving them the chance to find it out for themselves. Again the scientific method is chosen by Jesus, as we shall see is the case in so much of His dealing with these men.

The impression made on them is profound. One of them at once shares the news with his brother. Note his testimony to Peter. Does it seem strange to you that he should so quickly reach this conclusion about Jesus? In to-day's reading perhaps the most arresting verse is the last one. It illustrates two characteristics of Jesus—His quick intuition after only a brief knowledge of the individual, and His generous estimate of men which served to call out the best in them. What are the qualities of a rock? Does the story of Peter as we have it in the Gospels show these qualities? Does his later history—the man as transformed by Jesus—show them? Compare Peter before the servant girl (Luke xxii. 56, 57) and Peter before the Sanhedrin (Acts iv. 13). In

the light of events was Jesus' estimate of Peter (as shown by the name He gave him) justified ? Do you think Jesus' confidence in Peter was an important factor in producing the change ? Can we believe that God dares to put a similar confidence in us ?

THIRD DAY. FISHERS OF MEN. *Read Luke* v. 1-11.

In the story we read yesterday we see the first effect of meeting Jesus upon three men who later became members of the intimate circle of His friends. Here we have the story of the call. We may compare this account with that in Matt. iv. 18-22, where some of the more graphic details are omitted. Probably they refer to the same occasion.

It seems fair to assume, then, that this was not the first time these men had seen Jesus. Already they wished to be His friends. But something more was needed. The effect of the miracle on Peter is most marked. Perhaps it had a similar effect on the others, but they were not so impulsive or so quick to express themselves. As in other cases we have already studied, the presence and acts of Jesus enable another person to see himself. He has to face reality perhaps for the first time. What he sees is not very comforting. It is the kind of seeing from which anyone may well shrink—his weakness, failure, sin. But to Jesus this is the hopeful beginning for a new life. His oft-repeated word is uttered, " Fear not." Simon's fear was, in fact, the fear of himself and that awful vision of truth ; in fact, the fear of what being with Jesus might mean. But in that presence his fear leaves him as he " left all "—even his means of

subsistence. Such is the influence of Jesus on men then and still.

FOURTH DAY. A PUBLICAN ENLISTED. *Read Mark* ii. 13-17.

Levi or Matthew (see Matt. ix. 9-13) belonged to a class which, as we have seen, was much despised, being regarded as traitors to their country. In the case of Zacchæus, Jesus seems to have been satisfied to allow the tax-gatherer to continue his work. Levi, on the other hand, is called to leave it. There is no doubt as to the demand which Jesus made upon His friends. He did not hesitate to ask them to risk everything for Him, to give up a settled occupation and follow His wandering life. How could He venture to make such a demand ? Do you think the parable recorded in Matt. xiii. 44, explains this ? Anyhow, there were men and women in those days who were ready to respond to such a call. What was it about Jesus which made them do so ? What is it about Jesus which still causes men and women to leave all for Him ?

The story continues with a feast, incidentally a farewell to Levi's friends. Naturally they were of his own calling and from the circle of " undesirables " who would be willing to meet with publicans. Already Jesus is well enough known for this act to call forth comment and criticism. From the way in which Jesus answers His critics, what can you say as to His chief interest in men ? We may note the impression this would make upon the newly enlisted disciple. Levi had still much to learn about Jesus,

but some things he knew already. Can you mention a few of these ?

FIFTH DAY. QUALIFICATIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP. *Read Matt.* v. 1-16.

This passage contains some of the early teaching which Jesus gave to His disciples. At this time He may not have chosen the small company who came to be called apostles, but He had around Him a group who were listening to the teaching and who were already called " disciples." This teaching must have caused them very seriously to face what was involved in discipleship. It was no easy path which they had decided to follow. Jesus is very honest with them. Their standards of value must be largely reversed. The poor, the meek, the mourners, the persecuted were not to be pitied but rather regarded as supremely happy. Their eyes were to be fixed not upon the immediate difficulties but upon the final end which was so great as to be worth all sacrifice and pain here. They were to be lights in the world—what a responsibility for a few rather ignorant and unimportant people. Yet we can now look back to those weak men and see that their words and acts have been as lights in the world. Without them the supreme light of Jesus Himself could hardly have shone beyond Galilee and Judea.

Do you not think that some of these early would-be followers must have been turned away by this teaching ? Are we prepared to accept the discipleship of Jesus on these terms ?

SIXTH DAY. FIRST THINGS FIRST. *Read Luke* ix. 57-62.

The incidents related in this passage seem to have happened later in the ministry of Jesus, but may be considered in this connexion. They show again the way in which Jesus took pains to show men what was involved in following Him. He wanted no half-hearted disciples. In two of these cases there is no evidence that Jesus had first called the individual to come after Him. Whether so called or whether coming on his own initiative, however, the man in each case has some reservation. The first one seems not to have realized the discomforts involved in throwing in his lot with Jesus, who makes it perfectly clear that his lot is a hard one. The second may have used the plea only as an excuse. To Jesus the call is too urgent to admit of any such delay. Do you think this shows a disregard for obligations to the family on the part of Jesus? If not, how do you explain the answer? The third man only asks to bid "Good-bye" to his friend—a very little thing to do. Why does Jesus answer him in this way? There seems to be something severe (is it needlessly severe?) in the way that Jesus deals with these would-be followers. It is very different from much preaching one hears to-day about the shepherd who seeks the lost sheep (also a great truth), and from the pressure by which men are urged to come to Christ, the way being made as easy as possible for them. What fresh light does this passage throw upon the character of Jesus and His way with men?

SEVENTH DAY. CHOOSING THE TWELVE. *Read Luke* vi. 12-19 *and Mark* iii. 13-15.

In the first of these two passages we read that Jesus continued all night in prayer. Do you think there is any relation between this and the work of the following day? If we compare the accounts in Luke and Mark it almost looks as if the twelve shared the time of prayer with Him, for He called them up into the mountain, which is the place where (according to Luke) He spent the night praying. That night of prayer together, if such it was, must have been a very wonderful experience. Perhaps Jesus was introducing His inner circle into the deepest struggles of His own life and helping them, as they shared His prayer life, to understand in what relation He stood to His Father. No doubt He also had to lead them to the point of full surrender so that the power might be given them to do such works as He did.

In the story in Mark a little phrase occurs which is very significant, "that they might be with Him." Then Jesus felt the need of companionship, of sympathy, of friends on whom He could rely. Do you think of other occasions when this same thought is presented? If Jesus needed human friendship, can we say the same of God, or is this a characteristic of Jesus which simply belonged to His human nature like the need for food or clothing?

In Luke's Gospel the choosing of the twelve leads up to a period of intense activity. With these helpers Jesus could meet such a demand upon Him far better

than before. We see much reason in His choosing of apostles.

Review of the Week.

In the readings of this week we have a picture of the early life of Jesus with His most intimate group of friends, how they came to Him, the impressions He made on them, the way He received them, how the choice came which bound them to Him in a life-long loyalty. What can we say about the method of Jesus and about His character in the light of this week's reading ?

Negatively there are some things to be said. Jesus does not seem to have made any demand on men at this stage to express any belief in words. Those who came were not asked to accept anything about Jesus Christ Himself, or about God or the Church or the universe. It was enough that they were determined to follow Him. Again they do not seem to have been required to make any promise for the future. They were not pledged to Him. If they took the step of coming, that was enough. There is no educational test applied ; indeed, we learn later that some of them were ignorant and unlearned men (Acts iv. 13). No social standing is required : they were from various classes. They are not all of one occupation, nor are they similar in temperament. One is even chosen who proves later to have been unworthy of the choice, but he is given every chance along with the others.

Positively we see that Jesus called men one by one, that he saw their varied characteristics (note especially the nicknames He gives them), that He took great

pains in choosing them. It is also evident that He did demand a certain moral earnestness. It was no good to come one day and go the next. He was very frank in pointing out the difficulties, determined to have none under false pretences. His presence helped these men to see themselves, and in some cases almost drove them to despair; but that same presence gave them hope and helped them to discover their possibilities in God.

There is something in the way of Jesus with these men which we can call scientific. He wants them to find things out for themselves. The only way to do this is to "come and see," to take the risks of leaving all, to live with Him long enough and closely enough to be able to form their own opinions about Him, to accept the responsibility of service in His company. In the advance of science we find that men have to act in much the same way. They have to experiment and even to take risks if they are to make great discoveries. They cannot know all at the start. Knowledge is given slowly, and men try it out in all kinds of new ways. Do we not often forget this in teaching? Are we not so eager to give people our view of the truth that we try to hurry the process? It cannot be hurried. There is no short cut to the highest things. Jesus knew this. He allowed men and women to come and spend time with Him until they found out whether His words were true. He did not push them along the path more rapidly than they were prepared to go. Nevertheless, He was always at hand to help them. He showed them by His own example. When there was need or difficulty, He was near. He chose twelve that they might be

with Him. Are there not two sides to that companionship? He needed them in a life of tremendous strain and isolation. They needed Him, always at hand, if they were to learn the deep lessons of the new life.

Next week we see the development in the disciples as they lived with Jesus. But here we have to study the conditions which made that development possible. What are these? Can you state them as they refer to the attitude of the disciples to Jesus and as they concern His contact with them? For example, what degree of trust or love was needed at the start? What do you think Jesus was most anxious to secure in His followers, and what did He most want to do for them when they first came to Him? We have material for the answer to these questions in the week's passages.

EIGHTH WEEK

JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES: (2) TRAINING

Introductory Note.

This week we take a small part of the material available to illustrate the way in which Jesus trained the inner circle whom He had chosen to be with Him. The incidents and teaching dealt with this week all precede, as far as we can tell, the confession of Peter when at last the Master brought them to the point where they confessed Him to be the "Son of God." We must think of these men not as we know them in the Book of Acts and as the Church accepts them—great leaders, full of vision and courage. At this stage they are a scratch lot, fishermen, a tax-gatherer, maybe a carpenter and other simple-minded, honest men with many faults. One thing they had in common—devotion to Jesus Himself. They were ready to follow Him; they listened with respect, if sometimes with incredulity to His words; they were being gradually fashioned into a real group with a common purpose and message. But the process took time. This week we see something of the way in which it was accomplished, and in particular we see Jesus as the master-workman making what He can out of the material at hand. We may think of other great leaders in human history who have relied upon a group of

followers in order to give their message, and it may be worth while to compare and contrast the methods used.

First Day. New and Old. *Read Mark* ii. 18-22 *and Matt.* xiii. 51-2.

Fasting was a sign of the religious life in those days as sometimes now. It showed the determined spirit of the devoted worshipper, and it was believed to recommend him to God. That it has real value in helping to keep under the animal side need not be denied; in fact, Jesus Himself seems to have felt that it should be used at certain times. But in itself it had no virtue in His eyes. His followers should be radiantly happy, and fasting was a sign of grief.

He uses the occasion to drive home an important lesson. One wonders if the disciples did not receive a shock when first they heard about the new wine and the new garment. Very probably they came, in the first place, expecting that Jesus would lead them little by little and without any sharp break with the past, into new ideas and methods. Probably there were differences among them—the more timid who feared a break, and the rebel spirits who were impatient for it. Jesus had to blend the diverse elements into one harmonious group.

Can we specify ways in which Jesus' teaching called for a complete break with the past? Can we see a similar need in any direction in the world as we know it to-day? Revolution and evolution—each has its place in the world. The great problem is to

know where is the place and time for each. In the passage from Matthew's Gospel read to-day we have a statement of Jesus which shows His point of view on this issue. New and old—both are needed. Tradition is not all wrong. History teaches, but must not confine or cramp. The disciples, in learning not to fast, are learning something more. (In *The Way of Jesus*, S.C.M., a full study of the teaching of Jesus as "revolutionary" has been worked out in a companion volume to this.)

SECOND DAY. JOHN'S QUESTIONS. *Read Luke* vii. 18-35.

Can you not picture John the Baptist in prison? His courage has brought him to this terrible state. He feels sure he was right in announcing the Messiah. Yet what does he hear? The man to whom he bore witness is popular; His methods are so different from John's. He himself seems forgotten. Some of his own disciples now follow Jesus. The doubt arises in his mind, "Was I, then, mistaken?" The dreadful fear must be faced as to whether his life-work was wrongly conceived and has missed its mark.

The answer of Jesus is mainly a demonstration of His method. What do you think would be the effect on John of the message brought back by his disciples? As was so often the case, Jesus used the incident as an occasion to bring out some points in His teaching. To the spiritually-minded man it was clear that John had a wonderful message. Many no doubt were attracted by idle curiosity. But once they saw

and heard John, they knew that here was no mere fanatic. There have been many wild preachers of revolution and critics of their generation. Jesus gave John a much higher place. Why? It is interesting that the difference in their methods does not prevent Jesus from giving this warm commendation to His forerunner. Yet at the same time He points out the difference in no uncertain terms (verse 28). What troubled Jesus was the lack of insight in His generation. The lack of appreciation of God's working was due not to anything in the method, but to failure in the men themselves. They lacked true wisdom in spite of all their learning. It is easy still to miss God as He works in men and methods that are new and unfamiliar to us. The disciple is called to appreciate as well as to follow.

THIRD DAY. WHY BE FEARFUL? *Read Mark* iv. 35-41.

We are passing by much of the verbal teaching of Jesus and using mainly the teaching which came through action and arose directly out of incidents recorded. Of course, if we are fully to study the way in which Jesus taught His disciples we must study these also, but for this volume the acts of Jesus are being emphasized more than His words; and the latter mainly as they explain and come out of His actions.

This story gives an insight into the relation of the Master and His friends, and also into the ways by which they learned to put their trust in Him. It is not by being told that another is worthy of trust

that we most deeply learn to trust, but rather in what way? It is clear that these men (1) did not feel sure that their friend could or would help them on the occasion; (2) nevertheless, they did feel that even under such circumstances the natural course of action was to appeal to Him. One is reminded of the little child running to a parent when the thunder frightens him. It is an instinctive appeal to the one who is accepted as protector—not a thought-out action in which there is a clear conviction that help can be secured for this particular emergency.

Do you think the disciples expected help along the line given? Might it not seem to us very natural to be afraid, and is it not rather strange that Jesus should make any complaint of their fear? What attitude towards nature and God is indicated by His remark? If you had been in their company what would you have concluded about Jesus? In what respects is prayer, with us, like or unlike the appeal of the disciples to Jesus?

FOURTH DAY. LEARNING BY DOING. *Read Matt.* ix. 35-38 *and Mark* vi. 7-13.

To be with Jesus was to feel the desire to help man. Often we are told that He was "moved with compassion." The men and women in His company could not fail to catch something of His sympathy and love. He calls them to pray for labourers to go forth and help the needy. But scarcely has He given them this command when He shows them that it is they who must be the answer to the prayer. When we pray, do we not frequently find that we

must do something ourselves in answering the petition either for another or for ourselves? So this group of men, with so imperfect an idea of the work and nature of Jesus, are sent out to be themselves His representatives. Let us try to picture the mixture of fear and pride with which they heard this call.

Why do you think they were sent out two by two? Why had they to take so little with them? Why should they go on from place to place rather than to stay in one village? It will be well, if time permits, to read also the fuller injunctions as recorded in Matt. x. There is very much in them to make one think. They show much of what Jesus expected of these new disciples.

We note that the marvellous thing happened. They found they could do the very things they had been so surprised to see Jesus doing. Could they have been persuaded that they had this power in any other way? Have we hidden powers waiting to be revealed when we put our hands to a job which seems impossible?

FIFTH DAY. MUCH OUT OF LITTLE. *Read Mark* vi. 30-44.

This story follows immediately on the previous one. How pleased the disciples must have been as they told of the wonderful things they had done and seen, of the unexpected power, the words that came so much more freely than they expected, the crowds who listened! But the work was exhausting, and it is small wonder that the Master called them away

from the crowds for rest and refreshment. Then comes what must have appeared to them a disaster. The cherished hours with their great teacher and friend are broken into, the crowd is on their tracks, they cannot secure the needed rest. Do you not think they must have felt indignant and impatient? The crowd, which pressed in like this and robbed them of their well-deserved rest and of the Master's company, could be no friend of theirs. But how did Jesus greet them? Not only did He give them the healing and teaching for which they had come, but he adds another and wholly unexpected gift. Perhaps the chief lesson for the disciples here was again one of faith—never to despair or give up. If it is God's will that a certain thing should be done, can we assume that He will find a way of doing it? Will His ability to help depend in any sense on men, as Jesus depended in this case upon a boy who had a few loaves and fishes and on the group who gave them out? We might try to express the lesson of this incident in terms that apply to our own situation to-day.

SIXTH DAY. JESUS ON THE WATER. *Read Matt.* xiv. 22-36.

This week we are studying some of the stories of Jesus which are least easy for the modern mind to accept as literally true. The "nature miracles" certainly raise questions of a different kind from those raised by most of the miracles of healing. We cannot discuss the whole question of miracle in these studies, but we may remind ourselves of the utter incredulity

with which many modern inventions, such as wireless and flying, would have been met by our forefathers. They would have seemed "contrary to nature." (For a recent treatment of the subject see *A Faith that Rebels*, by D. S. Cairns. S.C.M.)

Perhaps we may take, as common ground, the statement that something happened which produced upon the mind of His disciples the definite conviction that Jesus was Lord of Nature. May we consider the incident as a factor in training these men. They needed to be delivered from fear of all kinds. This cannot be done by mere admonition. They needed to see God as loving even when nature is threatening. Argument alone cannot prove this proposition. Contact with Jesus Himself was creating that conviction in His friends and thereby fitting them to take their places with confidence in a world where fear rules many hearts.

Do you think that the belief in a friendly God makes a difference in our thought about the inevitability of what we call natural laws? Can you see, in the light of this passage, how it was that Jesus helped His disciples into a certain attitude towards God and the universe?

SEVENTH DAY. HARD SAYINGS. *Read John* vi. 41-71.

We read this passage to-day not primarily to consider the teaching of Jesus contained in it, although this might well occupy our whole attention. Let us think of it to-day as an example of His method. His popularity is at its height. With the lifting of a finger Jesus could carry great crowds with Him in

almost any endeavour. A recent scholar estimates that, given adequate leadership, there was a definite possibility of a successful revolt against Rome by the Jews.

Not only does Jesus deliberately refuse to be such a leader. Here we see Him actually putting difficulties in the way of simple-minded followers. Can you imagine why Jesus should do this? What was He afraid of (see verse 26)? The reaction of this discourse upon the multitude is immediate and marked. What is the cause of that reaction?

Here we are concerned not so much with the crowd as with the circle of His intimate friends. Let us take time to think of the emotions in the heart of Jesus as He asked the crucial question: "Will ye also go away?" What can we say about the relation of Master to servant as exhibited by this question? Here is Jesus staking everything upon—what? One can hardly fail to feel the amazement of the disciples as they see Jesus throwing away, apparently so recklessly, His chance of leadership, nor can we miss the rising doubt in their minds: "Perhaps, after all, He is not the leader we thought Him to be," echoed later in the words: "Dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts i. 6.)

Review of the Week.

Through this week we have followed Jesus as He walked and talked with the little group who had answered His call. Increasingly as time went on, He seems to have felt impelled to devote Himself to

them. Even His contacts with the crowd and with strangers must be read in the light of this steady purpose to train a few who could be utterly relied upon to carry on His work when He Himself was taken away.

Yet how unreliable they seem to have been! Uncertain of themselves and even of their chosen Master, culpably stupid we might even say in not seeing through to the real meaning of Christ's work. They certainly seem to have been unpromising material. Even John, the stern and fearless, who had faced the opposition of the authorities with his burning conviction of truth, is shaken as he hears the tales of Jesus' life. For the weaker characters of Peter and his friends the strain might well have seemed at times altogether beyond them. We have seen how Jesus deals with them. There is very little argument or persuasion. They are given a chance to form their own conclusions and to take their own way. At the same time they are led on step by step to see what is the nature of the Kingdom of which Jesus is to be King, what are the powers on which He relies, what are the methods which He can use. Perhaps more important is the fact that He put them to work.

When they found themselves able to use the very power they marvelled at in Jesus, something must have happened to them. When they took His teaching and tried to reproduce it in their own words, they would have been forced back to do the hardest thinking in their lives. Sometimes we feel that they have completely failed to see what Jesus stood for. Then comes a test and they meet it,

haltingly perhaps, but with the right response. Something holds them at the moment when others turn away. Is it in part a hope of preferment, personal ambition, and so forth? The later story makes it clear that such motives were not absent. Yet, perhaps, we are not wrong in concluding that, even at the stage we have been considering this week, some deeper appreciation of what the Master was trying to do dawned on them. They stay with Him at the time when many leave. We cannot miss the sense of personal loyalty called out by their love to Jesus, a willingness to follow even when they seemed to see disaster ahead. At the same time blind following was not enough for Jesus. It was clearly easy for Him to win followers by the sheer impact of so selfless and inspired a personality. Jesus wanted something much more, and it is this which we see in the study of the week.

Now, having let this thought possess us, we may turn again to the question underlying all our study. Is this what God is like? May we say that God Himself does not overawe us by His majesty, that He does not want unthinking followers, who have no conception of His nature and purpose in the world, even that He puts obstacles in the way of such a relation to Himself, in order that He may call forth *in us* the qualities which are in Him? Can we say that He also teaches us through what we have to do, so that in our poor experiments, our faltering efforts, our very mistakes, we discover as we could in no other way what sonship implies? These are some of the deeper issues which underlie this week's study. We may, perhaps, look back on our own lives,

their sorrows and difficulties, their mistakes and failures, their questionings and uncertainties, and see whether there is something in our experience which corresponds with that of the disciples as they went about in Galilee with Jesus of Nazareth.

NINTH WEEK

JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES: (3) TESTING

Introductory Note.

It is generally agreed that the confession of Peter, with which this week's study commences, marks a critical point in the relation of Jesus with His disciples. Up to that moment Jesus had not declared Himself. He was creating in the minds of His inner circle of friends certain convictions which grew out of what they themselves saw and heard. The moral was not urged. Jesus seemed unwilling to speak of Himself in terms which might perplex or even offend them. What was happening in their minds we can partly understand by considering their background as loyal and simple-minded Jews, the contacts with Jesus as we have been studying them the last two weeks, and their own words and acts during this period of initiation and afterwards.

At last the time came for a test as to how far they had gone. In the last study of last week we saw one such test. We cannot precisely divide, as the title for the two weeks of study may seem to, between training and testing. They are concurrent processes. But in the early months the element of training predominates, and severe tests are avoided. As the minds and hearts of these men become accustomed to the revolutionary nature of Christ's teaching and

the overwhelming demand He makes upon them, they are brought vividly to face the full significance of what they had been gradually learning. Such a change in the method of Jesus threw a strain upon these men and their relationship with Him. He evidently judged them at this point able to stand it, and He did not hesitate to make as plain as He could where the strain would fall. Of course He ran a great risk. These men might fail Him—and indeed more than once it looked almost certain that they would do so. But Jesus did not want them on any terms which would not stand the still greater strain of His death. He knew they would then be tested to the utmost. The time was very short. Things were moving to a climax in His relations to the authorities and even to the common people. Everything depended on what would happen when the great stress came to this handful of friends. It was absolutely necessary to discover their mettle and to test it, as far as it could possibly be tested, in the brief interval that remained. Reading between the lines we detect the eagerness, one had almost said anxiety, of Jesus as He brought these men to the test. His sharp reply to Peter, His rebuke to James and John, His repeated warnings to the twelve in regard to His forthcoming death, all reflect the intensity of feeling with which Jesus watched His loved ones in the critical days we are to study this week. Scarcely any part of His life speaks more clearly of His human feelings. For that very reason may we not in this week, catch a deeper insight into the ways of God with men ? Here before our eyes is enacted a moving drama in which Jesus touches the very springs of

human nature and shows us, if we have eyes to see, how God our Father draws us to Himself.

First Day. Peter's Confession. *Read Matt.* xvi. 13-20.

Volumes might be, and have been, written on this passage. We must concentrate upon one aspect of the story, its revelation of the method of Jesus in dealing with His friends. It is clear that He regarded this question as of first-rate importance. The almost casual nature of the first enquiry, as if it were simply a matter of passing interest, cannot conceal the depth of feeling as He proceeds to the central point: "Who say ye that I am?" What mattered was not the idle gossip of the crowd but the insight of the few. Had they got it? What had they really seen in the days of intimacy?—a wonder-worker? a good fellow? a profound teacher? a fearless leader? Or was it possible that they had seen beneath the surface and found God in His Christ? The idea that they should have done so seems, as we look back, almost absurdly unlikely. Stern monotheists, men of very little learning, mere children in the world's estimation, how could they have seen so deeply the things which kings and prophets had desired to look into? Compare the outburst of Jesus as recorded in Matt. xi. 25-26.

Looking at the human side, what were the qualities in these men which enabled them to see what so many entirely missed? How may such qualities be produced and strengthened in us?

Peter's confession is a statement of a foundation fact—a rock on which the Church is to be built.

Yet this fact, so utterly central and vital, is put into words not by the Master Himself. Everything hung on whether Peter and the rest could discover it themselves. Do you think the same may be true to-day, and that it is possible, by didactic teaching, to rob men of the joy and dynamic of making this discovery for themselves? It is open to question how much Peter put into the phrase "Son of the living God," yet if it was no more than a synonym for Messiah, it is significant that this was the title used.

SECOND DAY. SHRINKING FROM THE TEST. *Read Matt.* xvi. 21-28.

Assured of the measure of insight revealed in the conversation considered yesterday, Jesus proceeds to a first lesson in the cost of Messiah-ship. To the disciples there is a glamour connected with the word Christ (Messiah) coming down from past ages. What a glorious thing to be the Son of David, sitting on his throne, acknowledged by all, with authority to wield his sceptre, perchance to recapture his kingdom—and who knows how much more? Here is a thought which dazzles by its brilliance. Scarcely has it been confirmed in the minds of these still unstable men when Jesus shatters it with a few brief and terrible strokes. Going to Jerusalem is no coronation triumph as would be natural for David's successor as He marches into David's capital. It means suffering, rejection, death—unthinkable! Small wonder that Peter should break out with what must have been in the minds of all. Spokesman of the great confession, he becomes also spokesman

of the great refusal. "Be it far from thee—this shall never be."

Does the rejoinder of Jesus seem too hard? How could Peter be expected to see it all? Jesus had lived with the thought of His rejection for many days. Peter had had it forced upon his unwilling mind at a moment of supreme exaltation. Can we find in the word of Jesus any suggestion that He Himself had fought against the attractive idea of a triumph without the Cross? Can we also see something of the longing to have round Him a group who would see what He saw and could be counted upon to the last? Do you think even God may feel a need for human fellowship—such as we see in Jesus of Nazareth?

THIRD DAY. CONFIRMATORY EVIDENCE. *Read Matt.* xvii. 1-13.

In each account it is stated that about a week elapsed between the incident we have just studied and the transfiguration. We may speculate as to what was passing in those days in the minds of the disciples. It is hardly possible that they were not filled with conflicting thoughts. So great was the idea now brought into the open, that they were indeed walking on the roads of Palestine with the promised Redeemer of Israel! So repulsive was the idea that He of whom all the prophets had spoken, the hope of Israel, the light of the Gentiles, should be meanly done to death.

To these perplexed men Jesus shows Himself in a new light. They catch a glimpse of the glory *to be won through death*. Note that Luke says the con-

versation on the mount was in regard to the " decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." How could it be otherwise at this moment of His career ? Moses and Elijah—what is the significance of these figures in relation to the crisis in the mind of Jesus and His disciples ? Do you feel that this experience is important mainly for Jesus Himself or largely perhaps as part of the training for His friends ? What would be its effect in the latter way ?

We note that Jesus was very eager to keep this experience to the small group. Why ? We also note that on the way down there is a further reference to suffering. Is it strange that Jesus, who had clearly fought so big a battle within Himself, should wish to strengthen the hands of His closest friends as they had to fight a similar one ? Can we summarize for ourselves the chief lessons of this incident in regard to our main purpose in this volume ?

Fourth Day. The Spirit of the Venture. *Read Mark* ix. 33-50.

In the two incidents recorded to-day we get fresh glimpses of the way in which Jesus helped His disciples to see *how* to work for the Kingdom of God. Still obsessed with the greatness of the revelation there is eager disputing as to precedence among themselves. The disciples see in the glory of Jesus a chance of honour, perhaps they would say (as we are apt to do) of honourable service. The question of Jesus is itself enough to reveal to them how far they came from catching His spirit. They had sense enough to know, when asked, that their spirit had been all wrong, and to want to conceal the fact. How

direct and yet how delicate is the Master's way! In the presence of the child what could they say? And did not each one feel as he looked into the child's face: "Yes, after all, that is the thing I really get satisfaction from—helping a confiding child—a greater joy than ruling a city?" There is no resisting the direct appeal of the child's presence.

Pass on to the following, closely related, incident. The prestige of the Master at least must be defended, even if that of the disciple may be allowed to look after itself. But no! If there is an honest desire to serve, it will be accepted—even the cup of cold water counts. But there are two sides to the picture. The way of service is not a path of roses. There may be great losses to be borne. Only as we accept the discipline and curtailment can we receive the crown. Can we put down in a few words what to-day's reading tells us of the spirit in which Christ would be served? Are we serving Him in this way?

FIFTH DAY. WHAT IS FORGIVENESS? *Read Matt.* xviii. 21-35.

This passage, while a part of Jesus' teaching, may be included here as throwing light upon His method also. His contact with His disciples was clearly raising many questions in their minds. Perhaps Peter's arises from a concrete situation when he tried hard to follow what he believed to be the way of Jesus and when, maybe, he had not met with the desired response. One can hear him saying to himself, as we so often do: "Yes, I believe it is good

to try forgiveness, but there must be a limit somewhere. I think I have about reached it."

It must have been something of a shock to his complacency to get the answer here recorded. Jesus flings down a terrific challenge. Here is no small test of a man. Does discipleship mean anything so exacting as this? Jesus sees, no doubt, in Peter's face, his astonishment at this demand and his shrinking from anything so severe: He proceeds, therefore, with a story whereby He puts His hearers' moral judgment on the side of the very demand they shrink from accepting. No one can fail to condemn the servant who so acted. The meanness stands out for all to see and loathe. As they followed the story the disciples would exclaim in their hearts against the unforgiving servant almost before they realized the implication for themselves. But in the end no evasion is possible. If we but realize God's love and patience with us, how can we be unforgiving? Both here and in the words following the Lord's Prayer Jesus seems to say: "How dare you ask God to forgive you when you refuse your forgiveness to a brother?" The tests of discipleship do not get less as we think deeply into them. Have we failed in this test, or are we still trying, with Peter, to find where the limit is?

Sixth Day. Fire from Heaven. *Read Luke* ix. 51-56.

At last Jesus sets His face toward Jerusalem, well knowing that it was to be the place of His rejection. The disciples are filled with enthusiasm for His cause.

They could not receive the warnings. To them this move was the culminating act of His ministry and they could not doubt the issue. They had come to see in Jesus the God-sent Messiah, and this conviction had been wonderfully confirmed: they had seen His mighty works: they had been stirred to their depths by His teaching and His personality. Who could dream of anything but a triumph? Did they not know their own readiness to die for Him? Were there not multitudes of Galileans only waiting to hear the call? Who could resist such a force of devoted followers? On then to Jerusalem and make the supreme test with confidence and courage.

And then—what a pitiable first experience! These despised Samaritans actually refuse to give house-room to their Lord! The situation was intolerable. After all that they had seen Jesus do there would be no question in their minds as to the power He possessed, or could give to them, to call down fire. The stories in the Old Testament of the destruction of Sodom or of the bands that came to capture the prophet Elisha may well have suggested the idea.

But not so is Jesus to be vindicated. The "Sons of Thunder," as well as Peter, had their lesson to learn. Enthusiasm Jesus needed in His cause, but it must be directed by His spirit. Can you think of recent parallels where a good cause is endangered by ill-directed enthusiasm? What do we learn from this incident as to the aim of Jesus and as to the relation between that aim and the methods to be used in furthering it? Look up and compare Matt. xxvi. 53.

Seventh Day. The wider Proclamation. *Read Luke* x. 1-24.

Although Jesus has now turned His back on Galilee and has set His face towards Jerusalem, the time has not fully come for the great test to be made. The disciples have some more lessons to learn, as is obvious from the studies of this week. Now, with some deeper sense of what the message means, they are sent forth again—not only the twelve but no less than seventy. Perhaps these were not the twelve at all. But in any case the time had come to put the new lessons into practice. Armed with all the authority of their Master, preparing the way for Him, filled with the exaltation of their mission, these representatives went out and behold the very signs performed by Jesus they could do! Is it any wonder that they rejoiced?

Notice how Jesus deals with their exultation. To Him there is on the one hand need to recognize the tremendous seriousness and difficulty of the appointed task; all is not yet accomplished even though great doings are on foot. On the other hand, the outward triumphs are a much smaller matter than the inner relation to God. Not what they do but what they are is to be their chief ground of joy. Then, as if to remind them that all their gifts are no excuse for self-satisfaction, Jesus emphasizes in a brief prayer the fact that God's gifts are given to babes!

What are the qualities brought out by the experiences recorded in this day's reading? What place have they in the training and testing of Jesus'

followers ? Consider this passage in relation to the previous one. What is the difference between the policy of James and John and that of Christ as expressed in verses 10-15 ? In this connexion think of the story of Jonah. One wonders whether this was in the mind of Christ in connexion with this type of warning.

Review of the Week.

The process by which Jesus trained and tested His disciples is becoming plainer as we look at one incident after another. He brings them face to face with truths which may startle or even shock them. He does not soften the shock. But He leaves them to work out for themselves the application of these truths. At the beginning of the week we see Him, by a question or two, bringing them to the very centre of His message. We cannot miss the importance which Jesus attaches to their reply and, through this, to *them* in His plan for the world's redemption. Everything depends upon the kind of men and women He leaves behind Him and the qualities of mind and heart that have been developed through the years of intercourse with Himself.

One might suppose that, with so much hanging on the issue, Jesus would have poured into their minds the convictions about Himself and His mission which were evidently already present at the time of His temptation in the wilderness. Not so. He is content to wait. He even makes use of them, well knowing that their ideas are in many ways defective. Do you think the narrative suggests that Jesus is more

concerned to develop character in these men than to secure assent to truth? Do you think it shows that truth, in His view, is more powerful in men's lives when they discover it for themselves, than when it is pointed out to them by another?

Yet there is a certain sense of haste. Jesus was under no misapprehension as to the rapidity with which the crisis would develop when once He came out into the open, or as to the nature of the result. He must take every possible step to see that when He goes something remains. Not only definite teaching which may be more or less forgotten, not only that apprehension of truth which His disciples could reach during His lifetime which must in any case be incomplete, not only a personal devotion which might be blind and lead to misguided actions—are essential for the carrying forward of His great mission. In this week's study we see how these friends of His are brought to face reality, how their own deepest motives and instincts are brought to light through concrete situations. We hear much in these days of psycho-analysis. It may be well to ponder the ways in which one great end of the psycho-analyst was secured by Jesus in His work with His disciples—causing them to face reality. For them as for many of us to-day, it was very easy to live in a world of phantasy. Those were great days in Galilee. Anything might happen. Revolution was in the air. Expectations were keen, and people looked here and there for a Deliverer who was to do—what? When men heard and saw Jesus of Nazareth, their hopes rose high. They built their castles in the air. It was very easy to live in an unreal world whence

men commonly come down to earth with a terrible jar and suffer accordingly. There is clear evidence that the twelve lived in such a world as they walked the fields of Galilee with Jesus. To them He was the embodiment of all their dreams, and so with Him they dreamed as never before.

But to them, for this very reason, He became the realist *par excellence*. His problem was to maintain the enthusiasm and devotion while at the same time bringing them, as we might say, down to earth. He needed the childlike faith, the belief that anything might happen. But He also needed the stern stuff which could meet what seemed like irretrievable disaster and see beyond. He needed those who could bear to see their dreams set at naught, or perhaps so altered as to be unrecognizable, but who could still be dreamers of a new world and actors in the hard battle of bringing it into being. Such followers were not easy to find or to train. In the three weeks now finishing, we have caught some glimpses of how the Master set about the task. In the following week we shall watch the result, so far as it is recorded in the Gospels, and the way in which Jesus persisted in His methods until He was finally taken from their sight.

We pause at this point and again ask ourselves how far this process which we see being worked out by Jesus of Nazareth may be taken as a revelation of God's way with man. Is not nature doing something similar for us all the time? We are, as children, dreamers of many beautiful dreams. The "hard facts of life" shatter many dreams. But can we not gain courage from thinking of God, as revealed

in Jesus, training and testing us not to discard our dreams but to harness them to high adventure in the noblest tasks that man can attempt ?

When we see Jesus seeking an ever deeper response from and fellowship with these men, when we see His loving patience and His determined effort to strengthen them for the great tests that are to come, what conclusions do we draw about God ? Can it be that the eternal Father *relies* on men for His work in the world, that even He seeks our co-operation, our understanding of His will and way, our friendship with Himself ?

TENTH WEEK

JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES: (4) THE RESULT

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

We now come to the closing days of Jesus' life with His disciples. We may well ask ourselves what has been the result of His methods with His disciples. In the Fourth Gospel we are told of the withdrawal of Jesus to a city called Ephraim with His disciples (John xi. 54). The final clash was clearly impending. The appeal to the Jewish nation had failed. At the moment when His powers were at their height, on the morrow of the raising of Lazarus, Jesus is marked out for destruction by the cynical words of the High Priest himself, "It is expedient that one man should die for the people" (John xi. 50). The powers that be had put themselves on record as His enemies, and all that remained for Him to do was to see that some were left when He died to represent faithfully the principles for which He both lived and died.

The incidents we study this week are a painful reminder of the supreme difficulty of the task. Now surely Jesus was justified in looking for the fruit of the long labour bestowed on these men. He had shared with them His life and His deepest thoughts. They had been with Him in sorrows and joys, partaking of His early triumphs and of His

later disappointments. With these friends He had tramped the roads, fished on the lake, fed the multitudes, challenged the Pharisees, gone up the mount of transfiguration, prayed to His Father, faced the certainty of death. How could they have failed to breathe His very spirit, to understand without a word what He was seeking to do, to be prepared for whatever was coming ?

At first reading the record of the disciples' actions in these last few days might force us to the conclusion that Jesus had failed not only in the first purpose of bringing the whole nation to accept and fulfil its God-appointed mission, but even in the second one of calling out a " remnant " who might be able to do what the nation as a whole refused to do. Were we to read the Gospels without the Acts, we should surely write the word " failure " over this supremely important aspect of the work of Jesus. Can we doubt that in His own mind the thought of failure here was present, haunting Him even in the hour of death ? Remembering how much He relied on the success of this training and how many signs of its failure were provided in the last few days, cannot we gain a fresh insight into the heart of the Master as revealed in the prayer recorded in John xvii. ? By using our imagination for the studies of this week, we shall surely gain an insight into the ways of God with men.

First Day. Ambiticus still. *Read Mark* x. 32-45.

We have now come to the last journey to the national capital. We may say that Jesus had His

teeth set. There is something new in His demeanour as the tragic hour draws near. The little jests, the passing trivialities of travel have gone. This new Jesus seems a strange contrast to the companion whose presence has gladdened them so often, lightening heavy hearts as they tramped the roads together. Again He takes up the dismal tale of coming pain and death in even greater detail. Luke tells us, what is obvious even without his words, that they "understood none of these things" (Luke xviii. 34). So full are they still, at the eleventh hour, of their own idea of a Messiah's entry and victory, that they are deaf—utterly deaf—to the plainest words to the contrary.

What an evidence of this deafness was to follow! Two of His closest friends choose this moment of all others to put forward their claims for preference. You can almost hear them say to one another, "Now is our chance, let us get in first." Either themselves or through their mother they present their claim—a dismal commentary on their failure to grasp what Jesus so lovingly sought to convey. What is worse, the ten are all in the same state of mind. They see themselves cheated by the astute brothers; not one of them appears to realize the true nature of pre-eminence in the Kingdom of Christ—and this at such a moment and within a few days of the time when they must stand alone.

The reply of Jesus seems almost heartless, as if He had said, "I will take the price which must be paid for this honour, but I cannot give you the thing you have paid for." Yet if we analyse that answer, how true it is to life where we are often called to pay

a price for a position of eminence which in the end does not come our way. The fact that you have trained for the race does not insure the prize. To what motives for service does Jesus appeal in this story ?

Second Day. A Lesson in Humility. *Read John* xiii. 1-17.

Several days have elapsed between the incident last considered and those to which we now turn. Yet they may be well connected in our minds. Jesus is still wondering how to teach these men the meaning of humble service which it is clear they were still so far from having learned. Again, as when He called the child into the midst and on many previous occasions, He tries to teach by action. In a simple deed, for ever imprinted on the mind of each actor, Jesus makes a supreme attempt to bring them to see.

How little do they understand ! The disciple who made the great confession, voices what very probably others thought. If he thought to turn Jesus from His purpose, he cannot have known Him very well. With quiet persistence the Master continues the appointed task. Should we not have felt like Peter ? Perhaps the way to gain a different attitude is just to take the Master's hint, " If I, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's." Can we ever understand how the mightiest stoops to the lowliest unless we have ourselves done the things that He did, letting His spirit possess and move us ? The glamour of a great job, appealing to our sense of self-importance and

power, must give way to the real appreciation of what it means to be helpful in ways simple, unseen, and even perhaps unpleasant. This is the pathway to an understanding of Jesus, and indeed of God Himself. Do you get the sense of Jesus' disappointment and His desperate effort to save the situation as you read this episode in the light of our previous study ?

THIRD DAY. AN ENEMY IN THE MIDST. *Read Matt.* xxvi. 14-30.

The time has now come when the parting words must be spoken and the parting act performed. For this sacred and ever memorable meal Jesus gathers around Him the very men whom He Himself has chosen. With them He has had true fellowship, and He leaves them only after this final act of communion—the meeting of the everyday necessities of life—as a witness both to the intimacy of that fellowship and to the meaning of His death wherein He is shortly to sum up and express for all time His revelation of God the Father who meets man's evil and rebellion by the utmost expression of forgiving love. At this hour Jesus needs all that His friends can supply by way of comfort and understanding. Have they the power to meet so great a demand ?

As if to bring home to us the extent to which man in his blindness and perversity can miss the very highest revelation of good, there stands out prominently in this very hour the man who has rejected Christ, or perhaps tries up to the last to

thwart Him in His set purpose and to force Him to take another path. The picture of Judas in *By an Unknown Disciple* may well be studied—the man who loved causes rather than persons and who thought he knew better than Jesus how the nation was to be saved. What do you think were the motives for this act of treachery? Wicked deeds seldom appear to the doer in the same light in which the critic sees them. No doubt Judas had a "good reason" for his act. Might we say that Jesus' attitude towards the sinner is nowhere seen more clearly than in His dealing with Judas? What was His reason for keeping among the twelve a known thief and traitor? Did Jesus hope even to the last to bring him to see his sin and desist? What was the result for Judas? (Matt. xxvii. 3-5.)

FOURTH DAY. SLEEPING WHEN MOST NEEDED. *Read Matt.* xxvi. 36-46.

As we look back upon the story we should say that above all other times here was one when the friends of Jesus would not fail Him. How could they fail to catch the sorrow and agony of His spirit? How could they miss the intense yearning when He said to the chosen three, "Abide ye here and watch with me"? It was not a question of the ideas they had absorbed about Jesus, but of their loyalty to their best friend when in utmost distress. Never did a stricken man need his friends more. But at this hour they fail Him. It is hardly believable, for they did truly love Him.

Is it because they could not believe that He was

in such straits ? Were they still under the glamour of His mighty works and the triumphal entry ? How do you account for this inability to watch but one hour ? Psychologically, intense interest, anxiety, and passion tend to counteract the spirit of drowsiness. Does it not look as if they were not deeply moved even in the face of the supreme need of the Master ? When once awakened it seems scarcely possible that, for very shame, they would not keep awake.

We notice here how the Master deals with them. We catch the disappointment in His tones, but no harshness. Is this indeed a revelation of God for all time ? It is so easy to see the blindness of these men and to pour scorn upon such friends. What of ourselves ? Have we been blind to the need of men, to the call of Christ in that of our brethren ? Have we missed the great chances which others can so clearly see to stand by Christ in the hour when others forsake Him ? Perhaps it is well to think of this incident more in the light of what these men did and how Christ dealt with them and not only in the light of what He Himself went through in the garden.

FIFTH DAY. MISTAKEN TO THE LAST. *Read Matt.* xxvi. 47-56.

We have already given some thought to Judas and the way in which Jesus treated him. To-day let us think of the action of Peter and the other ten in the hour of crisis. We can well understand how they itched to be doing something. Perhaps their failure in the garden stung them to act at this point. Perhaps

they had not caught the inner meaning of Jesus' words recorded in Luke xxii. 35-38, or the almost indignant "It is enough" with which He rebuked their failure to see the point. Here was a chance—*the* chance—to use the sword. How human the act, even when the idea of resisting successfully was so absurd. Something must be done—out came the sword in what seems so silly a gesture of defence—from the very man who had gone to sleep when most needed and who would soon deny his friend.

Whatever might have been taken out of the previous reference to swords, there could be no mistaking the position of Jesus now. Why do you think Jesus refused to be thus protected—or to use His miraculous powers? It is not enough to say that it was in order to fulfil prophecy—or His destiny. There is a deeper inner meaning to be discovered.

As Jesus met His fate without striking a blow or permitting one to be struck for Him, he was teaching a lesson of infinite meaning to these men. How hard it seemed to be to learn it! Still thinking of an earthly kingdom, still wanting a success which would have spelt the defeat of all that Jesus stood for, they were not able to share the defeat which alone could bring the true success. So when He was taken "as a sheep to the slaughter," the disillusioned friends "left him and fled." What must have been the thought of Jesus then?

SIXTH DAY. THE GREAT DENIAL. *Read Matt.* xxvi. 69-75 *and John* xxi. 1-19.

In all the dealing of Jesus with men, none is so clearly set forth and none is more full of instruction than the story of His contacts with Peter. Could anyone have had more bestowed upon him, greater privileges, larger trust? This is the man whom Jesus dared to nickname "Rock," who took the lead time and again in confession and profession, who was in the inner group on the mountain and in the garden, who was warned and prayed for in respect of this very thing (Matt. xxvi. 31-35). But the disciple who would die for Jesus and who would defend Him against hopeless odds, falls before the taunts of a maidservant and even curses and swears when identified with the fallen leader. We cry out "Oh, Peter, how could you?"

Yet it does not require any deep knowledge of human nature to understand the fall. It is a very different thing to die in a brave act and to stand against the shafts of ridicule. There is courage needed not only for the soldier in the trenches but for the conscientious objector in his family circle or among his sneering companions. Peter possessed the one kind of courage, but in the other he was found wanting. Inaction was paralysing and left him defenceless. Had he been allowed to die with sword in hand, there would have been no denial.

What can we learn from the method of Jesus in dealing with His disappointing followers? Can you put into words the significance of that look (Luke

xxii. 61) ? What do you make of the resurrection encounter ? Note the early incident repeated (see Luke v. 1-11 and note the reaction of Peter). Do you see significance in the thrice repeated questions ? How could Jesus put such a trust in one who had proved so untrustworthy ? What is the supreme test ? Can we believe that God is likewise trustful of such as us, that in the hour of our shame His tenderness is most marked ?

SEVENTH DAY. STILL UNCONVINCED. *Read Luke* xxiv. 13-35.

The great blow has fallen. No popular uprising came to save Him. No angelic hosts descended to His rescue. He did not raise His voice in self-defence. He had not used His powers to come down from the Cross. His broken body had been put in the grave. All hope was gone. The cause which had called forth such enthusiasm would die out. The discredited band of His followers must get back to their jobs, cherishing a lovely memory and no more. Such must have been the thoughts in the minds of these two disappointed men as they trudged homeward on the first day of the week. Even the supreme exhibition of self-denying love had not opened their eyes. One might think that when this man "laid down his life for his friends," they would see Him as never before and their eyes would be wide open to the total meaning of His life. Even the story of the women had not relieved the sadness.

To these unconvinced and saddened men Jesus

drew near. How does He dispel their gloom ? The discourse must have been of some length, and we may well wish that it had been recorded. Not until their eyes are opened to see who it is who has thus talked with them, do they seem to have reached a new state of mind, even though their hearts had burned within them. Compare the record of Thomas in John xx. 24-28. It seems to have taken a great deal to persuade the disciples that all was not lost when Jesus died—and yet how patiently He had trained and tested them ! We are driven to ask whether, even with all the training, anything short of the resurrection could have convinced and inspired them. Men need a living God, and He it is who speaks to us in Jesus of Nazareth.

Review of the Week.

In four weeks of consecutive study we have reviewed the main episodes in the life Jesus lived with His disciples. Very little of specific teaching has been introduced, though this is, of course, needed if we are to get the full effect of His method of training. In Canon Raven's recent volume (*Christ and Modern Education*) the reader can study the whole question as seen by one who takes a modern view of education and who sees Christ's method as consistent with all that is best therein. For our purpose it is enough that we seek to understand what Christ meant to these men and how they came to their apprehension of God through Him.

We have seen them as they came under the spell

of His personality, as they were trained by seeing and hearing and still more by doing, as they met and often failed in meeting the varied tests of life. In this week we have had driven home to us the thought that after all the method came very near to failure. If we only had the Gospel record indeed it would seem to have failed completely. Among the inner circle was the betrayer Judas. Still seeking worldly advantage and preferment, still jealous of one another, still cherishing the expectation of a kingdom to be won by violence, still missing their opportunities through sleep and blindness of heart, still failing in face of taunts and jeers—these friends of Jesus seem the poorest kind of material out of which to build His Church. One is almost appalled by the risk which Jesus took in staking so much on so little. Was His agony in the garden in some part due to the plain possibility that even His friends would hopelessly misrepresent Him and that the very purpose of His life and sacrifice would thus be for ever lost through their failure? Was there, in His mind, a definite fear that He had not succeeded in opening their eyes to the real meaning of God for them and that even His death might not do so? When we read these records, due, let us remember, to the very men themselves, and authenticated for us in large part by that fact, the conclusion seems to be forced upon us that there was little probability of the persistence of the Gospel of Jesus after He had left—the instruments needed for the task being so utterly inadequate.

And yet Jesus hoped on. Grasp what it meant for Him to do so, and we can in some measure glimpse

the marvel of His faith not only in God but in weak and sinful men. Were we not so familiar with the story, had we not the Acts of the Apostles and the subsequent history of the Church to correct our ideas, should we not say at once that it was sheer folly in Jesus to put His trust in these people? If any such conclusion is forced upon us by the story, what does it say to us of God seen in the face of Jesus? "In Him we see what God is." Do we see it in this characteristic and in all the dealings of Jesus with His disciples? Can we count upon those qualities in the Creator which we have learned in these weeks to be present in Jesus and to show themselves in His actual dealings with the men and women of His most intimate group? If so, is not this a stupendous fact for humanity—that God is like Jesus?

And is it not also a stupendous fact, if true, that in Him we see "what man, through Him, may become?" For the qualities seen in Jesus in contact with His disciples are sorely needed in human society. If they can actually be manifested in men and women under the present conditions of life, is there not a great hope for us all?

We have seen how this result—the formation of a Christlike character in these men—was delayed even after the privilege of association with Him. The final touch could not, apparently, be given until Jesus was raised from death and enabled His friends to feel and know that He was with them all the days (Matt. xxviii. 20) a living personal presence. In the Acts of the Apostles we see how this conviction worked itself out, how the lessons of the days in

Galilee were not in fact lost, how the trust Jesus put in these men was in large part justified. It is a great record and it is an essential part of the study begun in these weeks, but on it we cannot here dwell.

ELEVENTH WEEK

JESUS AND HIS ACCUSERS

Introductory Note.

Early in these studies we gave preliminary consideration to the attitude of Jesus toward the religious leaders of His time. (Week II.) It may be well briefly to review our impression of that study before commencing this one. In this week we are to look at the developing antagonism between the official classes and this unofficial prophet. We shall try to see why their hatred grew and in what spirit Jesus met it. Again we can only touch a part of the material. The discourses against the Pharisees must be passed by, as we are seeking mainly to deal with incidents. One such already studied we may recall briefly, that is the healing of the man born blind (John ix., studied in Week IV, day 7). This is one of several cases where the issue bears upon Sabbath observance. At the commencement of Jesus' ministry this arose (see Week II, day 2), and towards the close of His life the same question comes up (Luke xiii. 10-17). Would it be fair to say that Pharisaic criticism was due not so much to care for the Sabbath as to fear of having their own authority undermined ?

In the case recorded in John ix. we see how the antagonism developed to the point of excluding an

individual from the synagogue. We have no record that this expedient was tried in the case of Jesus Himself. But there can be no doubt that the leaders had the will to do it. It is after many discussions with the Pharisees and others and a growing conviction that Jesus cannot be tolerated, if their position is to remain, that Jesus arrives in Jerusalem for His last visit. The triumphal entry rouses the Pharisees to a fresh outburst of indignation. How dare Jesus accept such homage from the common people (Luke xix. 39)? To Jesus the entry was anything but a triumph. He knew, whatever the crowds might do, that He had been rejected already in the only sense in which He had offered leadership to His people, and we cannot dissociate the moment of recognition from the words immediately following in the account by Luke (xix. 41-44).

This, then, is the point at which we take up the story. The long struggle is nearing its end. Jesus has striven to appeal to the nation as a whole. The leaders themselves have become hardened in their antagonism. Their hold on the masses is too strong. Very few have even a glimpse of the aim of Jesus. To accept their homage for an end that was not His was impossible. In the loneliness of a man whose own friends are still so largely blind to His real purpose, Jesus confronts enemies who at least are not blind to the fact that He cannot live in a world dominated by them and their ideas. We have to see how Jesus dealt with these men under these circumstances and what this tells us about God.

First Day. A direct Challenge. *Read Mark* xi. 15-19.

We may read beside this passage John ii. 13-22. It is generally assumed that there were two cleansings of the temple—one early on and one at the close of Jesus' ministry. The Johannine narrative, being arranged topically rather than chronologically, may give the story in its wrong place. It seems quite possible that the two accounts refer to one incident. The significance at this point in the story is unmistakable. Jesus has already in many ways challenged the prejudices and the authorities of His time. In dining with Zacchæus, in healing on the Sabbath, in making all meats clean, in opening the door to the Samaritans, in amending the law of Moses, Jesus has put Himself on the side of the common man and His deeper instincts of justice and decency as against the official man hedging these about with meticulous restrictions and taboos. Now He carries the challenge to the very centre of the nation's religion. In the temple itself a traffic is carried on under official patronage which offends the sense of what is fitting. Here, then, Jesus assumes authority and acts accordingly.

What is the authority to which He here appeals? What forces does He rely upon to accomplish His end? It has been suggested that this incident and the use of the whip are justification for the use of force in war. Does there seem to you any truth in that thought? We note that the amount of physical force used was wholly inadequate if that were the thing to which Jesus trusted, that the whip was

used (as is plain in the original; see also Moffett's translation of John ii. 15) only on the animals, and that in any case Jesus used nothing comparable for a moment to modern weapons of destruction. What force, then, do we see in Jesus which accomplished so much against these vested interests?

SECOND DAY. BY WHAT AUTHORITY? *Read Mark* xi. 27-33.

Is it any wonder that the religious leaders raised this question? Their status is put in jeopardy; their authority is challenged by the words of Jesus—by His drastic action on the previous day. How dare He so act? Such behaviour could not be passed unchallenged. With what perfect composure Jesus meets the demand! There is no doubt in His mind as to His right to cleanse the temple. He knows that He is on the side of truth and that, in this particular, there will be a response in men's minds acknowledging His authority. Compare the words at the close of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. vii. 29). The "authorities" cannot stand up against the inward attestation of "authority."

Why does Jesus take the case of John the Baptist in preference to giving a straight answer as in John viii. 54? Are we not again at the same problem which arises in the training of the disciples? A perfectly honest self-examination would give the answer. But this is exactly what the leaders of religion shrink from. They dare not face the consequences of truth in their own life. If they did so in the matter of John's baptism, the result would

spell disaster for their position and "authority." To face John's baptism quite honestly would be to answer the question they have put to Jesus. Any answer which He gives Himself must be as unconvincing as to describe a sunset to a blind man. But the path to vision is still open to them. By what way might they even then be able to see ?

THIRD DAY. INSINCERE QUESTIONS. *Read Mark* xii. 13-34.

We have seen the way in which Jesus dealt with enquiring minds. Here we have an entirely different proposition. There can be no doubt that the questions were inspired by a desire not for enlightenment but for a tactical advantage in the struggle with Jesus. If the crowd, or any considerable section, could be turned against Him, the rulers would have their way more easily. Their chief difficulty was the large measure of popular support behind Jesus (cf. Matt. xxvi. 5, etc.).

In the first question they try to put Jesus in the wrong with the civil authorities ; and in the second with the legalists (of the Sadducee party) among the Jews ; in the third (which is also an official question—see Matt. xxii. 34) with the moralists of the Pharisee persuasion. We note how, in each case, Jesus goes behind the question to a deeper point—the relation of the Christian to the State, the problem of immortality, the ultimate obligation to love. Again we find Him using the method of question to draw out the truth, and the appeal to a deeper sense of right and wrong within the man's own conscience. Even

a captious question is made the occasion for a serious answer which remains still to help us in our thinking on the deepest issues of life.

After the first question we read that "they marvelled greatly," and small wonder, for He had not only avoided a pitfall but used it to utter a profound truth which set them thinking. A similar result is recorded on the second answer in Matthew's account. In the third case the questioner is abashed. He has met one whose honesty and penetration, in spite of His lack of technical education, leave the learned questioner with no more to say. In tackling Jesus with the object of putting Him in the wrong, does not each find himself judged rather than the judge, and yet without any specific word of judgment from Jesus ?

FOURTH DAY. JESUS AND CAIAPHAS. *Read Mark* xiv. 53-65.

We pass over some material which bears upon the problem, in particular Christ's denunciation of the Pharisees as recorded in Matt. xxiii. We have evidence that the witness of Jesus by word and life had not been without its effect. "Even of the rulers many believed on him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess" (John xii. 42). The power rested in the hands of those whose determination to get rid of Jesus only deepened with each contact they had with Him.

It is not possible here to study in detail each stage of the trial. He was taken first to Annas, father-in-law to the high priest (John xviii. 13). Subsequently

the examination recorded by the first three Gospels seems to have taken place. We find Jesus surrounded no longer by a friendly, if ignorant, crowd who hung on His words, nor by a small group of intimate friends. How will He act when, alone and unsupported, He meets a group of suspicious and unfriendly people with all the weight of authority behind them?

Do you detect in Jesus any sense of fear or doubt? Do you see any sign that He might compromise? What are the characteristics of Jesus revealed most clearly in this passage? Consider His silence, His speech, His patience when the insults and blows fell. Can it be possible God is being revealed here—the God whom we think of as all-powerful, smiting down His enemies, establishing His rule on earth? Which is wrong—the idea of God which we see in, say, certain of the Psalms, or the idea which we see in Jesus in this supreme hour? To the disciples, steeped in Old Testament ideas, may it not have seemed incredible that God's Son could behave like this? Perhaps it seemed just as incredible to Caiaphas and his friends. If He were what He professed Himself, surely something very different was to be expected.

FIFTH DAY. JESUS AND HEROD. *Read Luke* xxiii. 1-16.

From Caiaphas Jesus is taken to Pilate, where the official indictment by the Jewish leaders is brought to Him. Pilate is eager to avoid responsibility and sends Jesus on, after a brief preliminary examination, to Herod. To-day we can think chiefly of Jesus as

He faces the king, taking to-morrow the story of Pilate.

What a contrast the few vivid touches suggest. The pleasure-loving king in his court, out for some new sensation, careless of the prisoner's agony and peril, thinking of Him simply as providing a passing wonder for his jaded taste. Jesus standing alone, a man of the people with one passion in His breast, to heal and save, bearing in His body the pain and sin of mankind, worn out in body but quiet and triumphant in spirit.

Why was Jesus again silent? As He stands listening to this battery of frivolous questions, can you feel the calm of that wondrous spirit? Herod becomes more and more impatient. The clamorous accusations sound in his ears. He cannot get the kind of sensation he wanted. He decides upon another, and one which will win the approval of the people. Anything for a little sport! And the object of it all the man to whom every subsequent generation has looked back as the very essence of perfect manhood and true kingliness. All Herod can do is to bully Him. All he sees in Jesus is weakness and foolish pretensions. He can find no crime, but at least he will humiliate Him. How can one who has in Him the sense of a world mission so meet this fool of a king? Do you feel in this a revelation of one form of greatness?

Sixth Day. Jesus and Pilate. *Read John* xviii. 28-xix. 16.

In this account we have as a consecutive story the interviews with Pilate—the man with whom the

sentence of death must rest. The interview with Herod probably came between verses 38 and 39 and may not have been known to the writer. In any case, he seems to have understood Pilate and the nature of the struggle in which he failed. We note the great difference between the actions of Jesus before the two men. With Herod Jesus will have nothing to do. He does not take his responsibilities seriously. In the case of Pilate there is a definite attempt to do so. That he was weak and susceptible to pressure, that circumstances were too strong for such a man, does not blind Jesus to the elements of good in him. He deals with his points in a quite serious way and indeed brings Pilate face to face with himself. Had Pilate been a different kind of man, had he not compromised himself by previous acts, who knows what might have happened ?

Again we have a man " in authority "—and again we see Jesus as the man who speaks with real authority (xix. 10 and 11). Can we not see Pilate's inner struggle ? How would you express its nature ? How did Jesus bring Pilate to face reality in himself, laying bare his self-interest and cowardice when a grave crucial issue had to be decided ? One cannot help comparing Pilate and Judas. In each case Jesus puts Himself, as it were, in the power of one whom He could easily overcome. Is there a sense in which God puts Himself and His world in the power of weak and foolish and erring people ? Dare we think of God in terms of Jesus as we see Him before Pilate ?

SEVENTH DAY. JESUS AND HIS MURDERERS. *Read Luke* xxiii. 33-49.

Through the long painful hours we have seen Jesus maintaining His quiet faith, showing His strength and courage against the background of His accusers and judges. In each case we get the undercurrent of passionate envy and determined hate on the part of the accusers. What a world of hypocrisy is revealed by the little word read yesterday : " They themselves entered not into the palace that they might not be defiled ! "

Now they have their way. The innocent victim is led forth. No word of bitterness or resentment escapes His lips. The blindness He has done so much to expose and sought so hard to cure is now urged as an excuse and a reason for forgiveness. Before this sight we stand in reverent wonder. We have the words of love and hope spoken from the Cross itself. We see the body nailed there and the spirit burdened beyond belief. We add our confirmation to that of millions who have said in awe with the centurion, " Certainly this was a righteous man."

In Mark and Matthew the phrase is different, " Truly this man was the Son of God "—a phrase that can have meant only a fraction of what it means to us. Can we say that with full meaning ? Dare we think of God in these terms ? This is the tremendous question pressed on all who think of Jesus crucified. To the Jews of the first generation it seemed incredible that the Messiah should suffer the death of a malefactor. To every succeeding generation it must seem incredible if we really think of its

full significance until there has entered into our hearts as our own experience the wonder and glory of it all, and we are compelled to say: "In Him *on the Cross* we see what God is like."

Review of the Week.

During the week we have looked into one aspect of what must always remain the deepest mystery and the most inspiring fact in the Christian religion. What fresh light—or what reminder of light previously received—have we to record as a result of the week's work? Perhaps here, more than in any previous week's work, there will be results varying greatly as between one and another.

There is no doubt that what happened to a certain number of people when Jesus lived in Palestine was that they were compelled, often in spite of themselves, to rethink their whole idea about God. This was not due simply to what Jesus said but also in large part to what He did. The same process has been taking place in many minds ever since. Now in this week we come to the very deep question, Can we really think of God as accepting the rejection, the contumely, the determined enmity of men in the way in which Jesus accepted it? To think of God, in a general way, as loving and forgiving is not difficult. To think of Him as patient with our blundering attempts, showing equal justice and friendliness to people of all races of both sexes, of all ages—this is relatively easy. But when we see Jesus right up against evil in the form in which it was manifested by those who led Him to death, when

we think of the Pharisees, Caiaphas, Herod, Pilate and the rest, and remember that the hypocrisy, cynicism, light-heartedness, self-interest, cowardice which we see in them are in the world—God's world—to-day marring its harmony and beauty—when we think of these things, can we possibly believe that God the righteous King can let them wreak their full force as they did upon Jesus? Have we not here a picture that goes beyond what the devout and honest mind can attribute to God? This is the crucial question raised by the week's study. It is not enough to answer with the *a priori* assumption that Jesus reveals God. In this volume we are trying to see what Jesus was really like in His dealings with men, and to see if this picture truly convinces us that God cannot be otherwise. But is it not true that in the thinking of very many God is otherwise? If it were not so how could we call on Him for some of the things men do still pray to God for—such, for example, as victory in battle?

Jesus brought to the bar of humanity the very men who brought Him to the bar of Pilate. He still brings men to the bar. We are judged by what He was and is, not by any words of judgment He uttered. To study with imagination the passages for this week is to have a window opened into our own souls. "In Him—we see what man, through Him, may become." What about our lives in the light of this week's study? What of the grudges which still lurk in our hearts and the desire for retaliation on those who have wronged us? Jesus not only delivered the maxims contained in the Sermon on the Mount, He lived them out. We have

seen, in this week's study, what that meant through the closing hours of His life. If this appeals to us as the most Godlike thing we have ever seen or dreamed of, there remains for us but one course—in humble acceptance of this ideal to seek for the spirit of Christ that it may be expressed even in us.

TWELFTH WEEK

JESUS AND THE FATHER

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

Having looked at Jesus in His contacts with men and women of varied personalities and groups, we turn in this last week to the deepest problem : What was the nature of His relationship to God ? Underlying all His acts and words is a certain assumption. In the very first story of His conscious life we come across it in the phrase " my Father." Nowhere, unless some might except a single sentence on the Cross, do we find any suggestion that this assumption was questioned. In the readings of this week we shall try to see what it meant for Jesus that He had this central conviction in His heart and mind.

In following this course we have to begin again at the beginning of His ministry. We pick up an incident here and there which throws light on the matter. To study it fully would require many weeks bringing under review much of the teaching of Jesus in addition to these incidents and words. For most, familiarity with these will supply many additional well-remembered sayings.

It might be said that such a study as this week's lies outside the scope of this volume. We are no longer seeing how Jesus reacted to the men and

women He met in the varied incidents of His life, and it was through such contacts that we felt it might be possible to gain some idea of "what God is." In this study we get the inward experiences and attitudes toward God Himself, a very different matter in this connexion. While this is partly true, there can be no doubt that the relation of Jesus to the Father is bound up in all His contacts with men—is part of the total impression they gained through these contacts. To omit this study would thus be to omit what is quite vital towards an understanding of Jesus. But there is another side to our study, which is not, perhaps, quite so prominent in the preceding pages. We also were seeking to understand "what man, through Him, may become." It is sometimes assumed that the relationship between Jesus and the Father was so utterly different from anything we can ever know, that it is, in a sense, irrelevant to this problem. He is removed, according to this view, utterly from us as the only-begotten Son of God, and it would be impious to suggest that His experience of His Father could ever be duplicated in human history.

If any feel thus, let them also remember that He is described in Scripture as "the first-born among many brethren," and that He calls us into the sharing of His deepest experiences (see, *e.g.*, passages in the last discourse in John xiv.-xvii.). At any rate let us come to this study with an open mind to see if we may through it learn more of God and of the meaning of the Christlike life.

First Day. The Beloved Son. *Read Matt.* iii. 13-iv. 11.

It is scarcely possible to over-emphasize the importance of these incidents in the life of Jesus. We may picture His boyhood and young manhood devoted to the ordinary tasks of the home and workshop, while all the time His mind is filled with the sense of His Father's business. Can we doubt that He grew in His apprehension of what this meant? Clearly He was not born with a mature mind and full consciousness of His mission and His relationship to God and His purpose in the world. How the process of maturing took place we can only guess. But it seems evident that the experience at the Jordan was a critical one. Something happened which gave Him the affirmation that He was not self-deluded. The Father to whom He constantly prayed had given the confirmatory sign. What do you think of the paraphrase of this word from heaven from the Gospel to the Hebrews: "My son, in all the prophets did I await thee, that thou mightest come and I might rest in thee, for thou art my rest?" At last the really filial Son is here, prepared utterly to trust the Father. Compare the daring words in Rom. viii. 19.

Jesus goes straight from this moment of exaltation and confirmation to a period of terrific testing. The heart of the test seems to rest in this sense of unique relation to God—"If thou art the Son of God." Can we say that Jesus was wrestling with the problem of what it meant to have this great name? Powers He possessed and could use, but what was the

condition of using them? Recognition He must seek if men were to be saved, but by what path was it to be won? Dominion was to be His if He was truly the Son of God, but what kind of dominion, and how should it be established? Can you expand these sentences and see in these temptations how Jesus was fighting His way through to the full significance of all that is implied in the voice from heaven?

SECOND DAY. JESUS THE REVEALER. *Read Matt.* xi. 25-30.

The passage follows immediately on the upbraiding of cities in which Jesus had worked. We might put in this connexion the question of the disciples: "Who then can be saved?" The words of Jesus are the answer. Jesus is utterly sure that God does reveal Himself to man. It needs no argument. He also sees what kind of spirit can receive the revelation. Knowing that He has been the recipient of the revelation of the Father, and not because of learning or position, but because of His absolutely filial spirit, He calls for the same spirit in others. This is the supreme condition for receiving light. In the following words it may be that we find ourselves in these days, challenged to a question: Is there no other way? Putting aside our prejudices in one direction or in the other, may we ask what, in this connexion, Jesus means by "the Son?" Does He here think of Himself as living only in time and space for one brief life on earth? or has His mind travelled into regions beyond, seeing Himself as the eternal Son, whose spirit is the source of all truly

sonlike attitudes towards God the Father? The filial spirit is perfectly embodied in the person who lived in this world nearly 2000 years ago. Wherever the filial spirit is found in man its source is the same, just as all light on this planet owes its origin to the sun, even though its immediate source may be a candle or an electric bulb.

The thought which possesses Jesus at this moment in His illumination and God-consciousness leads Him out into the great appeal which has been through all succeeding generations a source of inspiration and comfort and strength to millions. Can such a potent word spring out of self-deception? If we are to get a glimpse into the relation of Jesus to the Father, we need to ponder this significant passage long and deeply.

THIRD DAY. AN INWARD STRUGGLE. *Read John* xii. 20-36.

Scarcely any incident reveals more clearly the contending forces in the mind and heart of Jesus. In the visit of the Greeks Jesus sees the promise of the world-kingdom He had come to establish. The Jews are on the point of rejecting Him. Picture the exaltation of spirit as Jesus looked on these forerunners of the great multitude who were to acknowledge Him. "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified." The vision is momentarily blotted out by the recollection of the grim reality. Not a public vindication but a cruel death awaits the Saviour. Bearing fruit means, in nature, the acceptance of death. In the spiritual world there

is no other way. What is true for Jesus is true for His followers.

Yet again the vision opens up. Is there really no easier path? Why not win the Gentile world and walk away, as was still quite possible, from the Cross which His compatriots were preparing for Him? Might the Cross simply be failure? Many seeds die in the ground without bearing fruit. May He not pray to be saved so terrible an ordeal? But no. There is but one consideration that can weigh with the perfectly filial one—the Father's glory. Accepting that, the consequences can be safely left.

We note that Jesus does not Himself need the voice now. Compare the baptismal voice which seems to have been for Himself alone. Now He is completely assured. There is a tremendous inner conflict but the issue is not in doubt. We turn back to John xi. 41, 42, where again the faith of the multitude is considered at a moment when Jesus communes with the Father. Can we explain, can we at least see some part of the meaning of that word: "I thank thee that thou hearest me always?"

FOURTH DAY. JESUS AT PRAYER. *Read John* xvii. 1-26.

We need not hesitate to accept this prayer as a true expression of the Master's spirit and attitude, even though some may doubt its being an exact transcription of His words on one particular occasion. We read it to-day primarily as it reflects the intimacy of Jesus and the Father. In this prayer we get the consciousness of the previous existence with

the Father, which we hinted at in Matt. xi., but it is not so explicit in any account in the earlier Gospels. The thought of " revelation " dominates the prayer. What Jesus knew of the Father is so utterly assured, passing the hints and hopes of earlier revelations, leading us into an inner sanctuary.

Look at the reference to the past and at those to the future, and ask what is common to both. Note the emphasis on joy when in a few hours the blackness of Calvary was to supervene. Yet there is no easy optimism. The hatred of " the world " is still there as a background. Into the world of sorrow the man of sorrows has come, for it He has dedicated Himself, for it He still has hope that it " may believe that thou didst send me." How can such joy and such a hope shine at the moment when the darkness is about to overwhelm the soul of Jesus and when He is going forward seeing clearly that the hour is come ? Is it possible to explain this on any other hypothesis than that of a complete knowledge of the Father as Love and Power able to bring victory out of defeat and love out of hate ?

Again we are reminded of how much was hanging on the few and feeble followers. Looking not at the world but at them as we have seen their weakness and failures, might we not expect a very different kind of prayer ? If we had this prayer alone, what would we say of Jesus' sense of God and His mission among men ? Does our study of history and our personal experience confirm this estimate ?

FIFTH DAY. THY WILL, NOT MINE. *Read Luke* xxii. 39-46.

We come back to this scene as it helps us to understand the relation between Jesus and the Father. For months there has been in the mind of Jesus a definite conviction that the pathway to Saviourhood was a death freely accepted. "I lay it down of myself" is the expression not just of a moment, but of the steady purpose of life as He set His face to Jerusalem and went on without hesitation in the appointed way.

How then can we understand what seems to be a desire at the last moment to escape what has been deliberately accepted? Is it that the near approach of the dreadful moment makes it so much more real than ever before? Is the "cup" not death itself, but some special unforeseen or unrealized accompaniment? Is it possible that what Jesus most dreaded was the very distinct likelihood that He would die in vain, that the very thing He laid down His life for would be missed by His own inner circle and by succeeding generations? These are questions to ponder, not perhaps answerable, but helping us into deep thoughts of God and His ways with men as with Jesus Himself.

That the whole nature of Jesus shrank from the ordeal we cannot doubt. Is the scene in the garden simply a revelation of how deeply Jesus shared with the Father His inner conflicts, even though He was fully prepared to accept His will?

When we read, "I thank thee that thou hearest me always," what are we to make of the prayer apparently unanswered, "Remove this cup from me."

It is permissible to think that the cup was removed, and that death itself was less than what might have been if, let us say, in death God's presence had been withdrawn.

Sixth Day. Alone yet not Alone. *Read Matt.* xxvii. 33-50.

We approach this supreme moment with the question in our hearts, What can we learn from it of the relation between the Father and the Son? From the garden Jesus passes to the court where His trial was conducted, there to meet suspicion, hatred, reviling, mockery, with calm assurance. Led forth to die He has again thrown up at Him the old temptation, "If thou art the Son of God." But it has lost its sting so far as it might summon Him to work for His own release. Can we see a part of the agony, however, in the feeling that it was indeed God who was being mocked? Though these railing men quoted God, as it were, on their side, they were in truth setting Him at naught.

The crucial question in regard to the Cross seems to lie in the words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" To many these words imply that there was a moment when the perfect communion between the Son and the Father was broken, that this was the result of bearing the sins of the world, and that, to the perfect Son who had always lived in the sunshine of the Father's love, this constituted the supreme agony of the Cross. The words of Paul in 2 Cor. v. 21, etc., can be given in support of this view. Others feel that these words are to be read as part of the whole 22nd Psalm, of

which they are the opening phrase. Thus taken they imply a terrific struggle, in which and through which the assurance of ultimate victory is given as God's spirit leads His servant through the sense of forsakenness into the confidence that He is not indeed alone. This view is supported by the words recorded in Luke xxiii. 46, which imply a relationship of complete trust and full communion. Let us read over the whole Psalm and try to enter into this experience of Jesus as fully as we can. Whatever answer we give to the above questions we cannot fail to be stirred again by the sense of the Father's presence as revealed in and through Jesus of Nazareth.

SEVENTH DAY. ALL AUTHORITY. *Read John* xx. 19-29 *and Matt.* xxviii. 16-20.

The absolutely filial Son has gone forward to the fulfilment of the Father's will. In this supreme act we "see what God is," revealing Himself as so loving that He will rather accept the pain of rejection than impose upon men His will against theirs. May we say that the Cross is the measure of God's respect for the freedom which He has given to man ?

Yet the tragedy would indeed be unrelieved if we had to stand before the Cross and had no subsequent word. Evil has risen up to destroy, and has succeeded. Love has been led to the scaffold unresisting and is crushed. What hope is there for mankind in this ? The fact is that hope has sprung from the Cross—that by it men without number have triumphed over evil and been given assurance that the struggle is not doomed to failure. Why ?

There can be but one answer. The resurrection

stands for something no whit less true than the Cross itself. Not only did Jesus suffer and die. He rose again. In that risen life we see the perfect confidence in the Father's love and power undimmed by the experience of Calvary. Whence comes the word of peace repeated to the stricken disciples? How can there be confidence in sending them forth when His own mission has led to such a climax? There is something here which needs an explanation. The promise of the Spirit, of the abiding personal presence given so confidently, speaks volumes. The world-mission forecasted may be contrasted with the possibility opened up when so short a time before Jesus had stood upon a mountain and seen the kingdoms of the world. One way refused, another taken. The power to repel and to accept equally growing out of a life of fellowship with the Father such as we may but dimly realize. Do we wonder that Thomas said: "My Lord and my God?"

Review of the Week.

The completion of these readings and studies brings us face to face with certain questions, and in this closing week one of the most significant is raised. Can we in these days say with any conviction that Jesus was unique in human history? Does He meet the claim which is made for Him by the Evangelists, and which He seems to have made quite definitely for Himself?

Probably no one who reads these studies will question the abiding-place of Jesus in human life, and that He is, and probably always will be, a pattern of how men ought to live second to none. But that

raises the further question: On what was a life like this based? Was it on a stupendous self-deception by which He hypnotized Himself and His disciples and millions since? Was it even on a fraud practised by Himself? Or was there such a fraud perpetuated by His followers and deceiving a large part of mankind since? The more closely we examine the alternative solutions, the harder it becomes to get away from the conviction that Jesus was right, and that in Him we do see what God is, because He was and is the only-begotten Son of the Father. To accept this conclusion may seem to limit the illimitable God. But is the sun limited by the fact that its radiance can come to one through a dewdrop? God being what He is and we what we are—how could He reveal Himself to men? When we set ourselves that question we can find but one satisfying answer.

This week we have seen in some small degree what God meant to Jesus, the place which He actually took in His life. It has been said that for most of us God is the last resort when we are in difficulty or peril, while to Jesus He was at all times the first resort. Is this the impression you gain of Jesus in His varied acts as we have been studying them?

As we have looked into the face of Jesus afresh, have we found ourselves faced with questions about God? Has it seemed as if we were indeed looking upon God? Canon Streeter has said: "Few philosophers have fully realized the tremendous import of a personality whose mere occurrence in history compels us to face the possibility that love may be even one attribute among many in the power behind

the universe." (Streeter, *Reality*, p. 210.) Studying Jesus brings us again and again to such basic problems. It is through taking a definite attitude towards Him that we put ourselves on the road to discover what He has to reveal to us about God, just as the disciples, though slowly enough it is true, came through to a new idea of God by the path of enrolling themselves among His followers.

Coming back to the thought of Jesus as the example of what human life may become, we cannot fail in the light of this week's study to ask whether there may not be open to us a life of communion with the Father comparable at least to that which Jesus lived. Does He really mark out the way for us in this deepest aspect of human life ?

May we not try to sum up the results of the whole study and check the pregnant statement of the Jerusalem meeting in view of any fresh light we may have gained ?

" Our message is Jesus Christ. He is the revelation of what God is, and of what man through Him may become. In Him we come face to face with the ultimate reality of the universe."

Can we make these words our own ? Is our experience that of these people ? It is a tremendous thing to say about Jesus of Nazareth. If it be true, it is surely a truth that must mould our whole lives, determine our thinking and inspire our hopes for this life and what lies beyond.

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